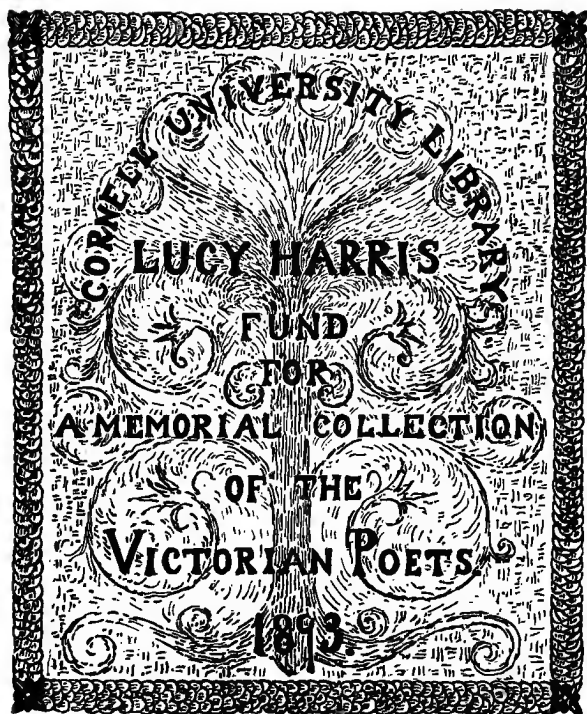






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James Thomson.

A. Ever 1883

A
VOICE FROM THE NILE
AND OTHER POEMS.

BY THE LATE

JAMES. THOMSON
(“B. V.”)

AUTHOR OF “THE CITY OF DREADFUL NIGHT,” “VANE’S STORY,” AND
“ESSAYS AND PHANTASIES.”

WITH A MEMOIR OF THE AUTHOR

BY

BERTRAM DOBELL.

LONDON:
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1884.

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JAMES THOMSON.



“ You would have kept me from the Desert sands
Bestrewn with bleaching bones,
And led me through the friendly fertile lands,
And changed my weary moans
To hymns of triumph and enraptured love,
And made our earth as rich as Heaven above.”

A POEM, a Drama, or a Novel, the perusal of which has moved our admiration, or affected our feelings, can hardly fail to make us desire to know something of its creator. We feel that the powers developed by the author must correspond with the faculties inherent in the man, and that the man must be at least as interesting as his work. It is not by insignificant or commonplace natures that works of enduring merit can be produced. Only by virtue of possessing unusual depth of feeling, intensity of aspiration, or wealth of intellect, does an author produce a masterpiece ; and his success is always in direct proportion to the fineness and richness of his own personality. Sometimes, indeed, the character of an author will impart a factitious importance to his works. How dim and shadowy a figure would Dr. Johnson now appear, had his reputation depended solely upon his writings !

Our interest in the works of Burns, Byron, and Shelley is surely doubled, at least, by the knowledge we possess of the events of their lives. And if, in becoming acquainted with their aspirations and their achievements, their errors and their sins are also made known to us, even so we have to consider that their faults were such as belong to mankind in general, while their genius belonged to themselves alone. The faults of common men die with them because the men themselves are forgotten, whereas the sins of a Burns or a Byron are remembered because he has himself immortalised them.

Mr. Thomson's works are excellent enough to stand upon their own merits; yet there is much in them that may seem obscure to those who know nothing of his life. His poems have this in common with those of Burns and Byron, that their interest is intensely personal. Most of them are reflections of his own individuality, and their interest depends upon the skill with which he has rendered his personal feelings interesting to the reader, rather than to his having dramatically expressed the thoughts and feelings of others. The key to his writings is to be found in the events of his life, and it is this key that I have endeavoured to supply in the following pages.

James Thomson was born at Port Glasgow, on the 23d of November, 1834. Both of his parents were Scotch, and James was their first child. The father had attained a good position in the merchant navy, and at one time occupied the post of chief officer in a ship trading to China. His mother was a zealous Irvingite, and it seems probable that it was to her he owed his deeply emotional and imaginative temperament. About

five years after the birth of James a second son was born, and in little more than a year afterwards the mother died. The father had by this time fallen somewhat in the social scale, owing, it is said, to habits of intemperance. I cannot give any other particulars respecting him, save a somewhat vague report that he became imbecile and died a few years afterwards. On the mother's death, the infant child was taken charge of by relatives living at Port Glasgow. Some friends of the father exerted themselves in favour of James, and through their interest he was admitted into that excellent institution, the Caledonian Orphan Asylum. Here he proved himself a quick and intelligent scholar, and his rapid progress in acquiring knowledge gave the greatest satisfaction to his tutors.

When the time came for him to quit the Asylum, the question arose of what was to be his future profession. What he himself desired was to obtain a clerkship in a bank or a city merchant's office. But no such place was to be obtained except on condition of his serving for a time without pay, and this he could not do, for he was entirely without resources. He had, it is true, well-to-do relatives in London, but they gave him no assistance. No choice was left to him but to take the advice of some of the masters at the Asylum, who advised him to qualify for the post of a schoolmaster in the army. He did so, although he much disliked the idea, and he was allowed to join the service as assistant-schoolmaster. In this capacity he was sent to Ireland, the garrison which he joined being stationed at Ballincollig, near Cork. It may be remarked here, that his position in the army, however distasteful it may have been to him, was not an

altogether unenviable one. The usual routine of school duty consists, I am told, in teaching the children for three hours in the forenoon, an equal time being devoted to the instruction of the adults in the afternoon. This leaves a good deal of time free for study or recreation, and there is plenty of evidence to show that Thomson made the best use possible of his leisure hours at this period.

During the time that he remained at the Asylum he spent his holidays at the home of a kind and liberal gentleman, an old friend of his father. From one of the daughters of this gentleman much of the information here embodied has been derived ; and I will now quote from her account of him a very interesting passage :—

“Being several years younger than James, I cannot recollect much about him as a boy, but I remember we always thought him wonderfully clever, very nice-looking, and very gentle, grave and kind. He was always most willing to attend to our whims, but my eldest sister was his especial favourite. Her will seemed always law to him. She was gay, as he was grave, but whatever Helen said or did won appreciation from him. . . . Previous to going (to Ireland) he earnestly requested that my sister might be allowed to correspond with him, a request which my parents thought it wiser to refuse. I was allowed, however, to do so, and although his letters came few and far between, I always welcomed and appreciated them. He used to endeavour to guide my tastes, and gave me good advice as to the books I should read, sending me Charlotte Brontë’s ‘Life and Letters,’ Mrs.

Browning's 'Aurora Leigh,' some poems by Robert Browning, and a few other books."

"Wonderfully clever, very nice-looking, and very gentle, grave and kind"—such is the happy and expressive phrase in which this lady sums up the impression which James Thomson made upon her and her sister in his youth. Nor was there any degree of partiality in their judgment, which was only that which any one coming in contact with him must have formed. Quick in acquiring knowledge, he had a memory that retained his acquirements firmly and tenaciously. Languages he mastered easily and thoroughly; and I am assured that he might have won a foremost place as a mathematician, had he persevered with his studies in that science. In literature his taste was at once catholic and unerring: he could relish Swift as well as Shelley, Fielding as well as Mrs. Browning. He had his special literary favourites of course, but I do not think he ever failed to recognise the merits of a really great work, or ever valued a poor or feeble one beyond its deserts. In short, it is hardly possible to imagine a youth of more promise than his was, and none who knew him then could have supposed that he was doomed to a hopeless and joyless existence, which was, in his own words, "a long defeat."

The army cannot be considered as a good school of morals or manners; and it is easy to conceive that the coarse and prosaic life of the camp and the barrack-room was very distasteful to the young student; for he had in full measure the fine sensibility and highly-strung nervous organisation that usually accompany poetic gifts. But it seems likely that what made his situation most irksome

was that he saw little prospect of escaping from it, and of attaining a position more congenial to his disposition, and offering more scope to the abilities which he felt himself to possess. To be gifted with fine feelings and to nurse great aspirations, yet to be compelled to labour at uncongenial or repulsive tasks is a sufficiently unfortunate fate; and the victim of such circumstances either sinks eventually to the level of his surroundings, or suffers cruelly in the endeavour to escape from them.

It was a noticeable trait in Thomson's character that he hardly ever failed to make warm friends of those with whom he came in familiar contact. He had not long entered the army before he had won the devoted friendship of Joseph Barnes, who was the Garrison-Master of the station to which he was attached. This gentleman was a self-educated man, who had attained his position entirely by the force of his own abilities. In befriending Thomson he was seconded by his wife, a most excellent and kind-hearted woman. In some Sonnets, written in 1862, but not intended for publication, Thomson delineates with an affectionate pen the characters of these two friends of his youth. Mr. Barnes he describes as—

“ A man of genial heart and liberal mind,
A man most rich in that rare common-sense
Whose common absence in its name we find;
A man of nature scorning all pretence,
And honest to the core, yet void of pride,
Whose vice upon that virtue most attends;
A man of joyous humour unallied
With malice, never making foes but friends.”

Mrs. Barnes, whom he addresses as the "second Mother of my orphaned youth," is thus delineated :—

"Thou patient heart to suffer and endure,
Thou placid soul to mirror heavenly truth,
Thou gracious presence wheresoe'er you go
To gladden pleasure or to chasten strife,
Thou gentlest friend to sympathise with woe,
Thou perfect Mother and most perfect Wife."

In another Sonnet he says :—

"My dear dear friends, my heart yearns forth to you
In very many of its lonely hours ;
Nor sweetlier comes the balm of evening dew
To all-day-drooping in fierce sunlight flowers,
Than to this weary withered heart of mine
The tender memories, the moonlight dreams
Which make your home an ever-sacred shrine,
And show your features lit with heavenly gleams."

Another of these Sonnets is of such interest and importance that I need make no apology for quoting it in full :—

"Indeed you set me in a happy place,
Dear for itself, and dearer much for you,
And dearest still for one life-crowning grace—
Dearest, though infinitely saddest too :
For there my own Good Angel took my hand,
And filled my soul with glory of her eyes,
And led me through the love-lit Faërie Land
Which joins our common world to Paradise.
How soon, how soon, God called her from my side,
Back to her own celestial sphere of day !
And ever since she ceased to be my Guide,
I reel and stumble on life's solemn way ;
Ah, ever since her eyes withdrew their light,
I wander lost in blackest stormy night."

This Sonnet sums up in brief the sad story of his life.

It tells the tale of his first meeting with his "Good Angel;" of his intense and overmastering affection for her; of her untimely death, and of his life-long misery and despair. Few words are needed to tell the story; but what a world of suffering is summed up in them!

This young girl was the daughter of the Armourer-Sergeant of a regiment in the Garrison. That she was a creature of uncommon loveliness, both of person and of mind, seems to be certain. She was described by Mrs. Barnes as resembling in character the *Evangeline St. Clair* of "Uncle Tom's Cabin." I mention this rather unwillingly, for I confess that my feeling with regard to the authoress of that once popular novel is anything but one of respect. Yet it must be owned, I think, that in delineating *Eva St. Clair* she has well portrayed a character of peculiar charm and sweetness. Twenty years ago it would probably have been difficult to find a reader who was not well acquainted with "Uncle Tom's Cabin;" but its popularity has so much declined of late years, that it is likely enough that *Eva St. Clair* is a name only to the great majority of the present generation. It seems worth while therefore to quote a short passage from the novel, in which her appearance and character are described:—

"Her form was the perfection of childish beauty, without its usual chubbiness and squareness of outline. There was about it an undulating and ærial grace, such as one might dream of for some mythic and allegorical being. Her face was remarkable, less for its perfect beauty of feature, than for a singular and dreamy earnestness of expression, which made the ideal start

when they looked at her, and by which the dullest and most literal were impressed, without knowing why. The shape of her head and the turn of her neck and bust was peculiarly noble, and the long golden-brown hair, that floated like a cloud around it, the deep spiritual gravity of her violet-blue eyes, shaded by heavy fringes of golden-brown, all marked her out from other children, and made every one turn and look after her, as she glided hither and thither. Nevertheless, the little one was not what you would have called either a grave child or a sad one. On the contrary, an airy and innocent playfulness seemed to flicker like the shadow of summer leaves over her childish face, and around her buoyant figure. . . . Always dressed in white, she seemed to move like a shadow through all sorts of places without contracting spot or stain ; and there was not a corner or nook where those fairy footsteps had not glided, and that visionary golden head, with its deep blue eyes, fledged along."

It is to be observed that this is the portrait of quite a young girl ; but it is obvious that a very slight degree of alteration is needed to make it apply to one much older. Moreover, the passage I have quoted agrees so well with the various references in Mr. Thomson's writings to his lost love, that I can hardly doubt that it is an essentially true picture of her. We have in "Vane's Story" a description of her which will well bear comparison with the above extract :—

" For thought retraced the long sad years,
Of pallid smiles and frozen tears
Back to a certain festal night,
A whirl and blaze of swift delight,

When we together danced, we two !
I live it all again ! . . . Do you
Remember how I broke down quite
In the mere polka ? . . . Dressed in white,
A loose pink sash around your waist,
Low shoes across the instep laced,
Your moonwhite shoulders glancing through
Long yellow ringlets dancing too,
You were an Angel then ; as clean
From earthly dust-speck, as serene
And lovely and beyond my love,
As now in your far world above."

Thomson's devoted love was fully reciprocated by the object of it. Both of them were still very young ; so young indeed, that it would scarcely have been a wonder if the rough soldiers amongst whom they lived, had been inclined to ridicule their attachment. But they were generally liked and respected : and all who knew them felt a kindly interest in them, and wished them well. Their dream of love and happiness was brief indeed in duration, but it was perfect and unalloyed whilst it lasted.

Amongst those with whom he became acquainted in the army, the most notable was Charles Bradlaugh. Both entered the service about the same time. They were then youths of sixteen and seventeen years, Bradlaugh being the senior by about fourteen months. It was a strange chance that brought these two, so unlike in nearly every respect, together. Bradlaugh, the man of action and enterprise, ever striving for practical ends, yet loving a contest, whether physical or mental, as much for its own sake as for any advantage it might bring him : of firm and inflexible determination, who, when he has once

resolved to attain an object, never rests until that object is achieved. Thomson, the student, the idealist and poet, or say the dreamer, who shrank with almost morbid dislike from the noise and tumult of publicity, and who, like Hamlet, was fitted rather for contemplation than for action. What points of contact had they to bring them together and unite them in the bonds of friendship? It is probable, indeed, that each liked and respected the other for the very qualities which he himself lacked; certain it is that they remained for many years on terms of intimate friendship.

Bradlaugh, even at this early period of his life, had made himself known as an advocate of extreme political and theological views. Thomson had been pretty well grounded in Presbyterian theology,¹ and although his views at this time may not have been strictly orthodox, yet he still believed in Christianity. Many and animated were the discussions that took place between them at this period—discussions that left each of them (as is usually the case) still of his own opinion. It would be a mistake to suppose that Thomson's opinions were modified in any way, owing to his intimacy with Bradlaugh. Whatever views he adopted were the result of careful inquiry and long meditation, and few persons were less likely to be swayed by the opinions of others. If he was any man's disciple, he was the disciple of Shelley, in whom

¹ He once gave me an amusing account of the sufferings he underwent in committing to memory what is known as the *Assembly's Shorter Catechism*, and of how he used to lie awake in bed shivering at the thought that he would have to learn another, longer and harder even than that.

he recognised his poetical and personal ideal. He studied his works with minute and loving care, and to the last never ceased to speak of him in terms of admiration and gratitude.¹ It is very probable that the study of Shelley's writings first led Thomson to doubt the truth of the doctrines of Christianity; but he would not have accepted even Shelley's conclusions had they not tallied with those which he arrived at by independent inquiry and thought. A change of creed to a sensitive person must ever be a painful process, and there is plenty of evidence to prove that it was so in Thomson's case. But one of his most marked characteristics was his complete intellectual honesty. His convictions were slowly formed, tenaciously held, and always expressed with vigour and decision. He never modified or softened the expression of his ideas from fear of Mrs. Grundy, or to conciliate his readers.² Had he been less sincere or uncompromising his literary career would doubtless have been more successful.

Thomson remained in the army as assistant schoolmaster for about two years, the regiment to which he was attached being stationed in Ireland during the whole of that time. At the end of this period he was (according to the usual practice) sent to the Training College at

¹ "Shelley" was the title of one of his earliest poems. It was written in 1855. It contains some fine passages; and I have omitted it from the present volume rather from want of space than from any misgiving as to its excellence.

² It is worth noting that one of his articles was found to be too audacious even for the uncompromising *National Reformer*. After two instalments of it had appeared, the third and concluding portion was suppressed.

Chelsea to finish the course of studies necessary to qualify him for the post of a schoolmaster. The usual practice is for the students to remain there for two years, which period is required in most cases in order to fit the candidates for their duties. In his case, however, it was quite unnecessary to keep him there for such a length of time : indeed, he was quite able to pass the necessary examinations after he had been there only six months. Routine, however, exacted a stay of at least eighteen months before he was allowed to receive his appointment as schoolmaster.

It was towards the close of his stay at the College that he received the news of the death of his beloved. One morning there came a letter stating that she was dangerously ill : the next morning came the news of her death. Words cannot picture his grief and sorrow for her. For three days after receiving the news of her death, no food passed his lips, and it can hardly be doubted that he intended to starve himself to death. Had he done so the world would have lost much ; but he himself would have lost nothing that he cared for, and would have been spared long dreary years of suffering and despair. Thenceforth Regret and Sorrow were his inseparable companions, and without hope and almost without object, his was rather a death-in-life than a healthy and natural existence. In striking him thus through his affections, destiny had wounded him where he was most vulnerable. No other affliction could have affected him as he was affected by this. In after-years he was doomed to endure much poverty : he suffered constant rebuffs in his endeavours to get his works published ; and finally neglect

and discouragement so far affected him, that for "seven songless years" his muse was almost or altogether silent. These would have been grievous trials to most poets, and perhaps to him also under other circumstances: but his capacity for suffering was exhausted by his one great grief, and all his other misfortunes were borne with stoical indifference.

He left the Training College in 1854, when the Crimean War was about to begin. He was first sent to serve with a militia regiment in Devonshire. Afterwards he served at Aldershot, Dublin, Jersey, and other places. As regards his conduct as a schoolmaster, it may be remarked that his duties were always efficiently performed; but, as he felt little interest in his profession, he made no pretence of doing so, and in consequence, perhaps, did not obtain so much credit as he really deserved.

It must not be thought that he yielded himself an unresisting victim to the melancholy and despair that had fastened themselves so firmly upon him. He read extensively and studied deeply; but it was the composition of poetry that best enabled him to forget for a time his sorrows. He destroyed many of the poems written in his early manhood; but enough remain to attest the industry with which he cultivated his poetical talents. In the years 1854 to 1860 he wrote many poems, some of which are of considerable length. Perhaps the most remarkable of these is "The Doom of a City," which was written in 1857. Comparing this with "The City of Dreadful Night," written fourteen or fifteen years later, we find a great difference of tone and spirit, but

nearly the same power of conception and execution. Both are characterised by mastery of thought and language, ease of versification, and command of various metres. Both display the same power of picturesque description: a power that invests the scenes and events described with extraordinary vividness. A painter would find in both many incidents inviting him to transfer them to his canvas, and he might do so almost without introducing a single detail that he did not find described in the poet's verses. In concentration of thought and intensity of expression, "The City of Dreadful Night" is as a whole superior to the earlier poem; yet there are some passages in "The Doom of a City" which equal even in these points the later poem. As regards the change that took place in the author's ideas in the interval that elapsed between their composition, the earlier poem supplies interesting evidence. The author of "The Doom of a City" believes in an over-ruling Providence, and in the Immortality of the Soul. He strives to reconcile the existence of evil with belief in a benevolent Creator, and labours to show that mankind are themselves responsible for the miseries they endure. Yet it may be perceived even here that he held these doctrines with no firm assurance, and that he was trying to convince himself that he believed them, rather than holding them with a complete conviction of their truth.

His first published poem was "The Fadeless Bower," which appeared in *Tait's Edinburgh Magazine* for July, 1858, with the signature of "Crepusculus." He continued to contribute to the pages of that magazine until it was discontinued in 1860. "Bertram to the Lady Geraldine,"

“Tasso to Leonora,” “The Lord of the Castle of Indolence,” and “A Festival of Life” were among the poems which he contributed to its pages. That at the time of their publication they did not attract much, if any attention may perhaps be accounted for by considering that *Tait* at that time had sunk very low both in circulation and influence.

About the same time he contributed some prose essays to the *London Investigator*, a periodical edited by Charles Bradlaugh. Amongst these were “Notes on Emerson” and “A Few Words about Burns.” Both articles are written in a spirit of warm admiration and appreciation of the great qualities of the subjects of them ; and I venture to think that the Burns celebration which produced such floods of prose and verse about him, brought forth nothing superior to Thomson’s essay as a vindication of his life and genius.

We obtain an interesting glimpse of Thomson as he was in 1860 from the lady whose picture of him as a youth I have already quoted. I give the account nearly in her own words, as I could hardly hope to improve upon her artless and unaffected story. After stating that they had had no personal intercourse with him for some years, she proceeds thus :—

“At last he wrote saying that he was to have a fortnight’s holiday, and would pay us a visit. We were all excitement at his coming. I had previously informed him in one of my letters that Helen had become a Ragged School teacher, and in reply he said he could not imagine a creature so bright and in his remembrance so beautiful, being arrayed in sombre habili-

ments and acting such a character. When he arrived Helen met him in the most demure manner possible, and kept up the deception, or rather tried to do so, for he was not to be deceived. Two days after his arrival, when he was sitting reading, she suddenly sent something flying at his head, at which he started up saying 'Ah ! I have just been quietly waiting for this ! you have been acting a part which does not become you, but you have now resumed your true character, and are the Helen of old.' During this visit we thought him much altered in appearance and manners ; indeed, we were somewhat disappointed. He was by no means so manly-looking as when he left London, and was painfully silent and depressed. He went from us with the intention of again going to Aldershot, but from that day until Mr. Maccall¹ mentioned him to us, we never once heard of him. Ever since we have felt greatly puzzled to account for his singular conduct."

It is no wonder that these ladies, knowing nothing of the story of his lost love, were puzzled to account for his silence and depression. He was always singularly reticent, in speech at least, about his private feelings, and only to those who had known him long, and whose friendship he had put to the proof, did he even hint at the cause of his unhappiness. I say "cause" because there cannot be a doubt that the death of his "only love" was the root of his misery : yet along with this there was another circumstance which contributed to his unhappi-

¹ William Maccall, author of "Elements of Individualism," and of many other remarkable, but unappreciated works.

ness. He had much in him, in fact, of the "self-torturing" spirit which afflicted Rousseau, and which drove Cowper into insanity. These moods of self-dissatisfaction he has well depicted in "Vane's Story," which is, in fact, when rightly read, as candid and complete an autobiography as was ever written.

"I half remember, years ago,
 Fits of despair that maddened woe,
 Frantic remorse, intense self-scorn,
 And yearnings harder to be borne
 Of utter loneliness forlorn ;
 What passionate secret prayers I prayed !
 What futile firm resolves I made !
 As well a thorn might pray to be
 Transformed into an olive-tree ;
 As well a weevil might determine
 To grow a farmer hating vermin ;
 The *I am that I am* of God
 Defines no less a worm or clod.
 My penitence was honest guile ;
 My inmost being all the while
 Was laughing in a patient mood
 At this externe solicitude,
 Was waiting laughing till once more
 I should be sane as heretofore ;
 And in the pauses of the fits,
 That rent my heart and scared my wits,
 Its pleasant mockery whispered through,
*Oh, what can Saadi have to do
 With penitence ? and what can you ?
 Are Shiraz roses wreathed with rue ?*"

It will be seen that the above extract not only depicts the moods I have spoken of, but also records his final deliverance from them. But he was afflicted by them for a good many years, and they contributed to bring

about the state of nervelessness and want of self-command into which he fell during the last three or four years of his life.

The reader may perhaps ask whether there was not some reason for these fits of self-scorn and remorse? I answer that there was probably as much reason for them in Thomson's case as there was in Cowper's. The good man suffers more from remorse for the commission of some microscopic offence, than the bad man who commits some atrocious crime. Thomson saw this clearly in after-years; and he has well satirised the mood in which we accuse ourselves of being desperate sinners (which yet it is probable that no really good man is altogether a stranger to) in the following epigram:—

“Once in a saintly passion
I cried with desperate grief,
O Lord, my heart is black with guile,
Of sinners I am chief.
Then stooped my guardian angel
And whispered from behind,
‘Vanity, my little man,
You’re nothing of the kind.’”

In 1860 the *National Reformer* was established, and Thomson became one of its contributors. His articles, however, only appeared at rather long intervals in the early volumes of that paper. His first important contribution to its pages was an essay on “Shelley.” It is a most eloquent tribute to the genius and essential greatness of the “poet of poets.”

Early in 1861 appeared a poem entitled “The Dead Year.” It reviews in an interesting and forcible manner the chief events of the year 1860. The two stanzas

descriptive of Mazzini and Garibaldi may be quoted as fairly representative of the spirit of the poem :—

“She¹ has two noble sons ; by these she *is*.
The Thinker ; who inspired from earliest youth,
In want and pain, in exile’s miseries,
’Mid alien scorn, ’mid foes that knew not ruth,
Has ever preached his spirit’s inmost truth ;
Though friends waxed cold, or turned their love to hate,
Though even now his country is ingrate.
The Doer, whose high fame as purely shines
As his,² who heretofore Sicilia won
With victories flowing free as Homer’s lines,
Sublime in action when the strife is on,
Sublime in pity when the strife is done ;
A pure and lofty spirit, blessed from sight
Of meaner natures’ selfishness and spite.”

In 1863 the beautiful poem “To our Ladies of Death” appeared in the *National Reformer*, and after that date his contributions to it, both in prose and verse, became more frequent. It is unnecessary to enumerate his various writings in it ; but it may be stated that most of the poems included in the two volumes already issued, and a large proportion of the prose writings contained in “Essays and Phantasies,” first appeared in the *Reformer*. It is hardly necessary to say that their appearance in such a quarter scarcely tended to advance his reputation. But in it he could publish without restraint his most heterodox productions, and his writings, it must be recollected, were often as heterodox from the Secularist as from the Christian standpoint. I do not know of any

¹ Italy.

² Timoleon’s. See Plutarch’s Lives ; whence the simile in the following line.

other paper or magazine in which "Vane's Story," or "The City of Dreadful Night" would have been allowed to appear.

Thomson left the army in October, 1862. He had long been weary of his position in it ; but the immediate cause of his leaving was that an accusation of a breach of military discipline was made against him. The story is not worth telling at length : but it may be stated that whether the accusation was true or false, it was one that reflected no moral blame upon him whatever. On leaving the army he applied to Mr. Bradlaugh, who was then acting as managing clerk to a solicitor named Levison, to know whether he could find employment for him. Bradlaugh at once engaged him as a clerk in his office, and also offered him a home with his own family. Thomson accepted this offer, and for some years thereafter the most intimate relations existed between them.

I do not find anything specially worthy of record during the next nine or ten years of Thomson's life, although, in a literary point of view, these years were perhaps his best and most productive period. In 1869 Mr. Froude accepted his poem called "Sunday up the River" for *Fraser's Magazine*, of which he was then the editor. Before inserting it, he asked Charles Kingsley's opinion upon it, whose judgment was warmly in its favour. This was almost the only instance (before the publication of "The City of Dreadful Night" in 1880) in which he was enabled to get one of his productions published, apart from the Secular papers. It may be worth mentioning that at one time he wrote two or three articles for the *Daily Telegraph*, and he might

perhaps have been regularly engaged upon that paper ; but leader-writing to order was by no means to his taste.

In 1872 he became secretary to a company which was formed to work an American silver mine. In this capacity he was sent out to America by the shareholders to report upon the prospects of their speculation. There he discovered that the shareholders had been deluded into purchasing an utterly unsound concern, so that his mission and his situation as secretary came to an end together. His general verdict upon the Americans is well expressed in the following extract from a letter to a friend which he wrote while there :—

“I think we must forgive the Americans a good deal of vulgarity and arrogance for some generations yet. They are intoxicated with their vast country and its vaster prospects. Besides, we of the old country have sent them for years past, and are still sending them, our half-starved and ignorant millions. The Americans of the War of Independence were really a British race, and related to the old country as a Greek colony to its mother city or state. But the Americans of to-day are only a nation in that they instinctively adore their union. All the heterogeneous ingredients are seething in the cauldron with plenty of scum and air bubbles atop. In a century or two they may get stewed down into homogeneity—a really wholesome and dainty dish, not to be set before a king though, I fancy. I resisted the impression of the mere material vastitude as long as possible, but found its influence growing on me week by week : for it implies such vast possibilities of moral and intellectual expansion. They are starting over here

with all our experience and culture at their command, without any of the obsolete burdens and impediments which in the course of a thousand years have become inseparable from our institutions, and with a country which will want more labour and more people for many generations to come."

Then comes a characteristic passage about himself :—

"I am quite well again. Though never perhaps very strong, and rarely so well as to feel mere existence a delight (as to a really healthy person it must be; no inferior condition, in my opinion, deserves the name of health), I am seldom what we call unwell. When travelling about I always find myself immensely better than when confined to one place. With money, I believe I should never have a home, but be always going to and fro on the earth, and walking up and down in it, like him of whom I am one of the children."

Soon after his return from America he was engaged by the proprietors of the *New York World* to go to Spain as their Special Correspondent with the Carlists, who were then (1873) in insurrection against the Republican government. Their cause was apparently prospering, and it was supposed that they were about to make a bold stroke and march upon Madrid. This however they did not attempt, and though there was much marching and counter-marching there was very little real fighting. Thomson gave in the pages of the *Secularist* an entertaining account of his Spanish experiences. He remained in Spain about two months, and whilst there was for a time prostrated by a sun-stroke.

Shortly after his return to England, he became

secretary to another company, which also collapsed after a brief career. In 1874 he published in the *National Reformer* his most remarkable work, "The City of Dreadful Night." This poem was much more fortunate than its predecessors, for it attracted a good deal of notice in literary circles, and was very favourably spoken of in the *Academy*. The *Spectator* devoted an article to it, which, though censuring its tone, yet did some degree of justice to the remarkable powers of the author. But what most delighted Mr. Thomson was a few words of praise from the author of "Adam Bede." For "George Eliot" he always felt and expressed the deepest admiration, and her praise probably gave him the greatest degree of pleasure that he was capable of feeling. Here is an extract from her letter :—"My mind responds with admiration to the distinct vision and grand utterance in the poem which you have been so good as to send me. Also I trust that an intellect informed by so much passionate energy as yours will soon give us more heroic strains with a wider embrace of human fellowship in them—such as will be to the labourers of the world what the odes of Tyrteus were to the Spartans, thrilling them with the sublimity of the social order, and the courage of resistance to all that would dissolve it."

Mr. W. M. Rossetti (to whose edition of Shelley's Poetical Works Thomson had contributed some notes), also expressed his great admiration for the poem, and thenceforth remained on very friendly terms with the author. Philip Bourke Marston, the unfortunate Oliver Madox Browne, and Miss Blind may also be mentioned

as persons who felt and expressed high admiration for "The City of Dreadful Night."

Apologising for whatever may seem egotistical in the narrative, I shall now proceed to give some account of my own acquaintance with Mr. Thomson. When I read on its first appearance in the *National Reformer* the poem "To our Ladies of Death" I became convinced that it must be the work of a genuine poet. I read it again and again, my admiration increasing with each perusal. Thenceforth I looked eagerly in each issue of the *Reformer* for some new poem or essay from the pen of "B. V."¹

The impression upon my mind of the great powers of this unknown writer deepened with time, and my wonderment was great that an author of such genius should confine it to the pages of the *Reformer*.

"The City of Dreadful Night" when first published ran through four or five numbers of the *National Reformer*. It was, however, crowded out of the paper one week, and held over to the next number. Thereupon I wrote to the editor to express my disappointment at its non-appearance, taking occasion at the same time to

¹ Bysshe Vanolis. "Bysshe" was chosen because of Thomson's reverence for Shelley, and "Vanolis" as an anagram of Novalis, the assumed name of the German mystic and poet, Friedrich von Hardenberg. It will be remembered that the life and character of the latter were largely affected by the untimely death of a young girl to whom he was deeply attached. Hardenberg, however, was not so inconsolable as Thomson, for he formed another attachment in no long time after his first love's death. A much closer parallel to Thomson's story was that of another German poet, Ernst Schultze; but of him Thomson knew nothing until a few months before his death.

avow my admiration of it, and of Mr. Thomson's writings generally. The editor handed my note to Mr. Thomson, who thereupon wrote me the following letter :—

“DEAR SIR,—I have just received from Mr. Bradlaugh your note about myself, and hasten to thank you heartily for your very generous expressions of approval of my writings. While I have neither tried nor cared to win any popular applause, the occasional approbation of an intelligent and sympathetic reader cheers me on a somewhat lonely path.

“You must not blame Mr. Bradlaugh for the delay in continuing my current contribution to his paper. . . . As an Editor he must try to suit his public, and the great majority of these care nothing for most of what I write. As for this ‘City of Dreadful Night,’ it is so alien from common thought and feeling, that I knew well (as stated in the Proem) that scarcely any readers would care for it ; and Mr. B. tells me that he has received three or four letters energetically protesting against its publication in the *N. R.*, yours I think being the only one praising it. Moreover, one must not forget that there is probably no other periodical in the kingdom which would accept such writings, even were their literary merits far greater than they are. . . .

“While preferring to remain anonymous for the public, I have no reason to hide my name from such correspondents as yourself.—Yours truly,

“JAMES THOMSON (B. V.)”

In replying to this letter, I expressed a wish to become personally acquainted with Mr. Thomson. He was

pleased to accede to my request, and thenceforth we remained on terms of friendship up to the time of his death.

“Why don’t you bring out your poems in book form?” was naturally one of the first questions I put to him. Thereupon he explained that he thought it very unlikely that any publisher could be found who would risk money in publishing them, and that he had no means of paying for their publication himself, as most modern poets have to do. This led me to make an offer of such assistance as might be in my power to give him. At first I intended to take the entire risk of their publication upon myself, but my circumstances took rather an unfortunate turn about that time, and I was compelled, very much to my regret, to abandon the idea. Mr. Thomson then tried various publishers, most of whom told him frankly that there was no market for poetry, and that they could not undertake to publish for him. This was fair enough, and he had no ground for dissatisfaction with these gentlemen: but it is not so easy to excuse a certain publisher, who, after making a definite promise to publish, and keeping him for some months in suspense, at last refused to fulfil his engagement. Whilst I am upon this subject, it will be well perhaps to relate the circumstances under which the poems were eventually published. It happened to occur to me in a fortunate moment that an application to Messrs. Reeves & Turner on Mr. Thomson’s behalf might meet with success. I had already made an unsuccessful trial in another quarter, the gentleman to whom I proposed it valuing his respectability far too much to run any risk of forfeiting it by publishing anything so heterodox as “The City of Dreadful Night.” Messrs.

Reeves & Turner being liberal-minded men who had already distinguished themselves by bringing out the handsomest and most complete edition of Shelley's Works, were not alarmed even by Thomson's heterodoxy, and it was promptly agreed upon that "The City of Dreadful Night, and other Poems" should be issued at the joint risk of those gentlemen and myself.

Returning to Thomson's connection with the *National Reformer* and Mr. Bradlaugh, it has to be noted that in 1875 disagreements took place between the editor and his most brilliant contributor, which led to the latter's secession from that paper. I have already dwelt upon the utter unlikeness of character of the two men ; and considering this, it is by no means surprising that they eventually disagreed ; the wonder is rather that they remained friends for so long a time.

It was now necessary for Thomson to seek for other employment ; and he was fortunate enough to obtain a literary engagement, which during the few years he was yet to live was to prove his main dependence. Messrs. Cope, the well-known tobacco-merchants of Liverpool, published at this time a monthly periodical called *Cope's Tobacco Plant*. I suppose their main object in issuing it was to advertise their business ; but however this may be, their periodical was of an unusually bright and entertaining character. It was conducted by Mr. John Fraser, whose success in discovering unknown talent, and in availing himself of it, made him a model editor. The contributors were paid on a very liberal scale, and it is probable that Thomson derived almost as much advan-

tage from his contributions to the *Tobacco Plant* as from all his other literary labours put together.

To the *Tobacco Plant* Thomson contributed articles on Ben Jonson, Rabelais, John Wilson, James Hogg, and Walt Whitman; also reviews of books, a series of papers on Tobacco legislation, &c. He was, in short, one of its most constant contributors from 1875 until it was discontinued in 1881.

Shortly after Thomson's secession from the *National Reformer* a new Freethought paper was started, entitled the *Secularist*. To this periodical he now transferred his services, and during the eighteen months that it lasted, he was a constant contributor to its pages. His articles in it were on the most various subjects, and any one who now looks through a file of it, must become convinced that his talents as a journalist were of a very high order, though it may be regretted indeed that his powers were so wasted. One of his most important contributions to the *Secularist* was a series of articles on Heinrich Heine, who (after Shelley) was the author with whom Thomson was most in sympathy, and whom he had most thoroughly studied. His translations from him have gained general praise; and I think it may be truly said that no other translator has so well rendered the spirit and music of Heine into English. One of the projects which were cut short by his untimely death was a book on Heine, which he had undertaken to write.

I will now quote a few passages, which are of general or personal interest, from his letters to me. The following paragraph, which is from a letter dated June 20, 1874, refers to a poem by Mr. W. M. Rossetti:—

“ ‘Mrs. Holmes Gray’ I want to read carefully before returning. If he wrote that in 1849 when he must have been very young, I can’t understand how he came to abandon poetry for criticism. It is quite mature in firm grip of the subject, and has no youthful faults of redundancy, rhetoric, exaggeration, ornament for ornament’s sake, affectation, and so forth.”

In a letter dated June 24, 1874, after referring to the notice in the *Academy* of the “City of Dreadful Night,” he adds, “I have just written to the editor thanking him and his critic, and saying that it seems to me a very brave act on the part of a respectable English periodical, to spontaneously call attention to an atheistical writing (less remote than, say, Lucretius), treating it simply and fairly on its literary merits, without obloquy or protesting cant.”

I quote the following passage from a letter dated January 9, 1876, because it gives his answer to some censures that have been passed upon his use of certain words in his poems :—

“With regard to Mr. Bullen’s criticisms on ‘Our Ladies of Death,’—criticisms which really flatter me, as any man’s work is really praised by such examination,—I must hold myself right. The only English Dictionary I have by me is a school one, but as such little likely to venture on neologisms ; moreover, it is very good of its kind, being Reid’s of Edinburgh. This gives Sombre, Sombrous, dark, gloomy ; Tenēbrous, Tenēbrious, dark, gloomy, obscure (and, of course, Tenebrious implies Tenebriously) ; Ruth, pity, sorrow ; Ruthful, merciful, sorrowful ; Ruthfully, sadly, sorrowfully. The huge

Worcester Webster, into which I looked a day or two after your letter came, agrees as to tenebrious and ruth; I forgot to look in it for sombrous. But as to ruth, I used it in the common sense of pity, not that of sadness and sorrow. When I wrote—

‘My life but bold
In jest and laugh to parry hateful ruth,’

I meant to parry the pity of others, not to parry my own sadness, which, indeed, jest and laugh must intensify instead of parrying. My thought was much like that of Beatrice, ‘The Cenci,’ Act v., Sc. 3:—

‘Shall the light multitude
Fling at their choice curses *or faded pity*,
Sad funeral flowers to deck a living corpse
Upon us as we pass, to pass away?’

And from the light indifferent multitude, as you must know, curses are even less unwelcome than pity when we are profoundly suffering. I looked into the Dictionaries not knowing whether their authority would sustain or condemn me, as I am used to trust in careful writing to my own sense of what is right; this, naturally, having been modified and formed by reading of good authors. Even had the Dictionaries condemned me, I should in these cases have been apt to assert my own correctness; in many others I should be ready to yield without contest. In the ‘City of Dreadful Night’ I used tenebrous instead of tenebrious; just as good writers use, as it happens to suit them, either funeral or funereal, sulphurous or sulphureous (Shelley often in ‘Hellas’), &c. You will think that I have troubled you with many words on a very little matter. . . . As it is now just

eleven P.M., and I have much to do to-morrow, I will conclude in pity for myself if not in ruth for you."

The next extract is from a letter dated November 1, 1878 :—

"I am very sorry but scarcely surprised that things are not very flourishing with you just now. You are correct in supposing that it is ditto with me. With the natural depression of trade infinitely aggravated during the past two years by the wretched impolicy of our Jewish-Jingo misgovernment, it cannot be well with anybody but arm-manufacturers, exchange speculators, and Hebrew adventurers; and things seen likely to grow much worse before they get better. . . . The 'Improvisations'¹ I shall be delighted to see. It is so scarce that I have never yet been able to come across it, and have never seen any mention of it save that by Rossetti in his supplementary chapter (a very fine one) to the 'Life of Blake.' It is not even in the British Museum, having been printed for private circulation only, if I remember aright. I should think it would be a real treasure to any of Wilkinson's few admirers; for, as you know, the fewer the devotees of any man or thing, the more enthusiastic."

The following is from a letter dated December 23, 1878 :—

"Many thanks for the 'Improvisations.' . . . A brief glance at it, and perusal of the remarkable note at the

¹ "Improvisations from the Spirit," by Dr. Garth Wilkinson. Mr. Thomson was a warm admirer of Dr. Wilkinson's writings, and under the title of "A Strange Book," he published a series of articles on the "Improvisations" in the pages of the *Liberal*, a monthly magazine.

end, make me anticipate its study with unusual interest. . . . Just lately, and in these days I am pretty busy for Fraser; and well for me that it is so, for I have not earned a penny save from him the whole year. There is more work to do on the Tobacco Duties; and also verse and prose for the Christmas Card, but not so much as last year, nor offering such genial opportunities and associations as Chaucer's *Canterbury Pilgrims*.¹ The subject this time is the Pursuit of Diva Nicotina, in imitation of Sir Noel Paton's Pursuit of Pleasure. Paton is a good painter and poet too, but of the ascetic-pietistic school, or with strong leanings to it."

The next quotation is from a letter dated October 19, 1879:—

"I can still but barely manage to keep head above water—sometimes sinking under for a bit. You see what I do for Cope. I have not succeeded in getting any other work except on the *Liberal*, and this is of small value. . . . I thank you for keeping the Whitman² for me: I sold it with other books when hard up. In the meantime I have the latest 2 vol. edition in hand from Fraser, who has requested some articles on him when Tobacco Legislation, &c., will allow. I mean to begin him now in the evenings at home, as the Legislation can be done only in the Museum. He may occupy such intervals in the paper as did the Wilson and Hogg, both done by request: the 'Richard Feverel' was on my

¹ This refers to two large coloured plates which were issued with the *Tobacco Plant*, for which Thomson wrote explanatory and descriptive matter in verse and prose.

² Whitman's "Leaves of Grass."

own suggestion. George Meredith, to whom I sent a copy, wrote me a very flattering because very high-minded letter. He has seen the 'City;' and though by no means sanguine with such a public as ours, he thinks it should float a volume. The admiration of so many excellent literary judges really surprises me. . . . All this about myself because I have nothing else to write about, going nowhere and seeing no one."

July 1, 1880, he writes:—

"Last Tuesday I spent with Meredith; a real red-letter day in all respects. He is one of those personalities who need fear no comparisons with their best writings."

Here is a passage from a letter dated January 5, 1881:—

"With Mr. Wright and Percy I went to George Eliot's funeral. It was wretched tramping through the slush and then standing in the rain for about three-quarters of an hour, with nothing to see but dripping umbrellas. I was disappointed by there being any chapel service at all. At the grave old Dr. Sadler mumbled something, of which only two or three words could be distinguished by us only a couple of yards behind him."

During the last two years of his life Thomson was frequently at Leicester, where he had many good friends, of whom Mr. J. W. Barrs was perhaps the most zealous. Here he was comparatively happy, as the following extract from a letter dated June 21, 1881, will show:—

"We are here four miles from Leicester, with railway station a few minutes off, in a pleasant villa surrounded

by shrubbery, lawn, meadow and kitchen garden. Host and hostess (sister) are kindness itself, as are all other Leicester friends. We lead the most healthy of lives, save for strong temptations to over-feeding on excellent fare, and host's evil and powerfully contagious habit of sitting up till about two A.M. smoking and reading or chatting. I now leave him to his own wicked devices at midnight or as soon after as possible. Despite the showery weather we have had good drives and walks (country all green and well-wooded), jolly little picnics, and lawn-tennis *ad infinitum*. (*N.B.*—Lawn-tennis even more than lady's fine pen responsible for the uncouthness of this scrawl.) In brief we have been so busy with enjoyment, that this is the first note I have accomplished (or begun) in the seventeen days. . . . *P.S.*—Grass and ground too wet for lawn-tennis this morning, else this scrawl might not have got scrawled."

It will most likely occur to the reader that there is some degree of incongruity between the passage just quoted, and the general tenor of the narrative. But in truth the change was so great from his solitary existence in London to the comfort and cheerfulness of his life in Leicester, that it is no wonder if he became for a time comparatively happy. In London he lodged in one narrow room, which was bed-room and sitting-room in one, and where he could hardly help feeling a sense of poverty and isolation. A morning spent at the British Museum, an afternoon walk through the streets, and an evening passed in reading or writing : such was the usual course of his daily life in London. Visits to or from his few London friends sometimes varied the monotony of

his existence ; and now and then he would go to a concert or to the Italian Opera, for he was passionately fond of music. In London, in short, it was almost impossible for him to forget his sorrows : in Leicester the kind attentions of his friends, their cheerful pastimes and lively conversation, only allowed him to remember them at intervals.

I have already said that it was not Thomson's custom to parade his sorrows in public ; but that he was, on the contrary, uncommonly reserved about his private feelings. It would never have occurred to a casual acquaintance that he was one whose existence was a burden that he could scarcely endure. When with friends he was an unusually pleasant companion. He conversed easily and fluently on whatever subject might happen to be started, and frequently gave utterance to a happy jest, or an epigrammatic phrase. There was not the slightest degree of assumption in his manner, nor did he ever allude to his own writings, except when he was invited to do so. But his wounds were not the less painful, because he did not exhibit them in public ; and of their deep and permanent character, I had once a striking proof. We were talking together lightly and cheerfully enough, when a casual remark which I made chanced to recall the memory of his lost love. Well do I remember the effect upon him : how his voice changed, and how tears started to his eyes !

I have already related the circumstances under which his first volume of poems was ultimately published by Messrs. Reeves & Turner. This was in April 1880, and the book was on the whole favourably received by

the press and the public. Perhaps the most generous and unstinted recognition of the interest and importance of the poems was in an article by Mr. G. A. Simcox in the *Fortnightly Review*. Naturally enough the tone and spirit of the "City of Dreadful Night" came in for a good deal of adverse criticism, although the power and excellence of the writing were generally acknowledged. One acute critic, whose penetration is not usually so much at fault, expressed an opinion that the intensely gloomy character of the poem did not represent its author's real feelings, but was merely assumed in accordance with a prevailing poetical fashion. Thomson must have smiled rather bitterly on reading this, for if ever there was a work which expressed with entire sincerity its author's mind and feelings, that work was "The City of Dreadful Night." It was the outcome of long years of suffering and despair, of ceaseless yearnings, fruitless regrets, and continual ponderings upon the mysteries of human life. True or not to humanity at large—and doubtless, to make it true universally, the dreadful gloom would have to be lightened with many rays of sunlight—it was at least a true expression of the author's thoughts and experiences; and it is to be feared that his case was by no means singular, and that the inhabitants of "The City of Dreadful Night" are far more numerous than comfortable and respectable optimism has any conception of. The poem must always remain unsurpassed as a picture of the night-side of human nature: that there is another side Thomson was well aware, and he is perhaps as successful in depicting the bright as the dark aspect of life.

The measure of success which attended the issue of his two volumes of poems¹ naturally gave him much pleasure: but it was too late for that or any change in his circumstances to benefit him much. The same degree of success, had it been obtained ten or twelve years earlier, would doubtless have had the happiest results. How unfortunate it was that appreciation of his gifts came so late will be seen when it is considered that for nearly or quite seven years (1875 to 1881) he almost entirely discontinued the writing of verse. How much might have been accomplished in those years, if only he had been encouraged by the sunshine of success! But his spirit was now in a great degree broken, his energies were relaxed, and the tough constitution that had enabled him to endure so long a pilgrimage of sorrow, was at last breaking down. For these results I am bound to say that his misfortunes were not alone responsible. That he should become during these latter years a victim of intemperance was hardly surprising, however much it was to be deplored. His early loss, his poverty, his comparative failure as an author, the sense of isolation and despair that possessed him, and which at night deprived him even of sleep; that he sought refuge from the consciousness of such miseries as these in the temporary forgetfulness derived from drink, could not be wondered at. Let the reader peruse the poems of "*Mater Tenebrarum*" and "*Insomnia*," both of which depict with

¹ "*Vane's Story, and other Poems*," was issued in October 1880. "*Essays and Phantasies*," which was issued in 1881, had only a qualified success. Only a few critics recognised the great excellence of Thomson's matter and style in prose.

absolute fidelity his night thoughts and experiences, and he will have some idea of the causes which impelled him with irresistible power to drown thought and remembrance in the Lethe of alcohol. Yet it must not be thought that he yielded unresistingly to its temptations. Against it he would strive hard, and for a time perhaps successfully, so that he would seem to have overcome his enemy: but the spell would at last prove too powerful for him, and he would remain enslaved by it for a season, until he was left at last utterly exhausted and unnerved. To see him when he was in this condition was a most painful sight, and it used to afflict me in no ordinary degree. I must be excused, however, from dwelling further upon this painful subject: let it suffice to say, that he became more and more a victim of intemperance, until it ultimately hastened, if it did not cause his death.

Of the last few months of his life I need not say much. The reader will see by the dates affixed to the poems in the early part of this volume, that his poetic powers had only been lying dormant, and that the vein of his genius was by no means exhausted. The poems here printed will, I think, bear comparison with the best of his earlier productions, with the possible exception of "Weddah and Om-el-Bonain." Even this masterpiece of narrative poetry he might have equalled or surpassed if he had lived, for he stated that he had conceived the story of another poem which he thought would give full scope to his powers. But this, like much else, was to remain unaccomplished: he was taken ill on June 1, 1882, and being removed to University College Hospital, died there on June 3. He was buried at Highgate cemetery,

in the same grave as his friend Austin Holyoake, on June 8.

I borrow from Mr. Flaws' excellent essay on Thomson¹ the following description of his personal appearance and manner :—

“He looked like a veteran scarred in the fierce affrays of life's war, and worn by the strain of its forced marches. His close-knit form, short and sturdy, might have endured any amount of mere roughings, if its owner had thought it worth a care. It is rare to find so squarely massive a head, combining mathematical power with high imagination in so marked a degree. Hence the grim logic of fact that gives such weird force to all his poetry. You could see the shadow that ‘tremendous fate’ had cast over that naturally buoyant nature. It had eaten great furrows into his broad brow, and cut tear-tracks downwards from his wistful eyes, so plaintive and brimful of unspeakable tenderness as they opened wide when in serious talk. And as he discussed the affairs of the day, how the poet would merge in the keen-sighted trenchant critic, whose vocabulary was built up of the pure and racy English of all the centuries, always striking yet never pedantic !”

One reflection will probably have suggested itself to the reader of the foregoing sketch. Was not—he may perhaps ask—the fact that Thomson allowed his whole existence to be blighted by the death of a young girl, evidence of an essentially weak or defective character? To be endowed—like Burns for instance—with passions and affections of extraordinary force, is undoubtedly a misfortune, and

¹ Published in the *Secular Review*.

the possessor of them, if he is capable of sometimes reaching the highest heaven of enjoyment, must atone for this by frequently descending into the deepest hell of despair : but it would be absurd enough on the part of those whose feelings are dull, and whose passions are torpid, if they claimed, on those scores, to possess the more perfect temperament. No doubt if Thomson had been ruled by reason alone, he would have quickly forgotten his "only love," and his life would have been happier, or, at least, would have been something altogether different from what it was. But in the lives of most men (and women too) reason plays a very small part compared with the part played by the feelings or affections. If we were ruled by reason alone we should cease to regret a parent, a lover, or a friend, the instant they were cold in death : but one who could do so would scarcely be regarded as human at all. As grief for the departed is natural to us, in what way shall we set bounds to it ? Those whom we love or respect but little, we do not long grieve for ; but what length of time can assuage our grief for those whom we have loved with the whole strength of our hearts ? Thomson, being a poet, was therefore a man of far more than ordinary intensity of feeling. What Mr. Palgrave has said of Shakespeare (in relation to the "Sonnets") applies equally well to Thomson :—

" 'There is a weakness and folly in all excessive and misplaced affection,' says Mr. Hallam. . . . Such excess, however, as it must appear in the light of common day, is perhaps rarely wanting among the gifts of great genius. The poet's nature differs in degree so much from other men's, that we might almost speak of it as a

difference in kind. This, in the sublime language of the 'Phædrus,' is that 'possession and ecstasy with which the Muses seize on a plastic and pure soul, awakening it and hurrying it forth like a Bacchanal in the ways of song.' A sensitiveness unexperienced by lesser men exalts every feeling to a range beyond ordinary sympathies. Friendship blazes into passion. The furnace of love is seven times heated. An imperious instinct demands that Beauty and the adoration of Beauty shall, somehow, spite of human faults and faithlessness, and the grave itself, secure the 'eternity promised by our ever-living poet.'"

No critical estimate of Mr. Thomson's place in English literature can be attempted here: for I have neither the right nor the ability to make such an estimate. A poet should be judged by his peers: and I have often felt no small degree of indignation when I have read a review by some anonymous or obscure scribbler, who, all unconscious of his own intellectual deficiencies, has presumed to lecture Mr. Browning or Mr. Swinburne in the style adopted by a pedagogue towards a dull scholar. But I will not deny myself the pleasure of quoting some words relating to Thomson from the pen of the Rev. J. W. Ebsworth, a gentleman whose knowledge of our old poetical literature is certainly unsurpassed, even if it is not unequalled: and who, if he had not devoted himself to the labour of bringing to light the works of others, must have made a reputation as a poet for himself. He says:—"Of his genius, true and strong, there can be no question whatever among competent judges. If we except Browning, there is no poet living who can be considered as his

superior. With his theological or anti-theological views I had no quarrel ; I only regretted some few utterances (chiefly in foot-notes) which might prove hindrances to his being generally accepted. Such things did much to retard the general recognition of Shelley's genius."

Looking back upon what I have written, I feel how inadequately I have performed my task. I only attempted it because of my earnest desire to see some degree of justice done to the memory of one whom I admired indeed as an author, but whom, in an even greater degree, I loved as a man. The world is strangely blind to its great men, and a Shelley, a Wordsworth, a Browning, or a George Meredith has to die, or at least to labour unnoticed for many years, before the great British public begins to discover that a splendid addition has been made to its most glorious endowment. If I have done a little to hasten the coming of the time when Thomson's great gifts shall be appraised at their true value, my labour has not been in vain, and I shall not go unrewarded.

I must not conclude without thanking most heartily my friend Arthur H. Bullen, Esq., who has kindly looked over the proofs of the present volume, and to whom I am also indebted for some valuable suggestions. Nor must I omit to mention Thomson's old friend, Mr. John Grant, whom I have to thank for having furnished very much of the information upon which I have founded the present memoir.

LAST POEMS.

A VOICE FROM THE NILE.¹



I COME from mountains under other stars
Than those reflected in my waters here ;
Athwart broad realms, beneath large skies, I flow,
Between the Libyan and Arabian hills,
And merge at last into the great Mid-Sea ;
And make this land of Egypt. All is mine :
The palm-trees and the doves among the palms,
The corn-fields and the flowers among the corn,
The patient oxen and the crocodiles,
The ibis and the heron and the hawk,
The lotus and the thick papyrus reeds,
The slant-sailed boats that flit before the wind
Or up my rapids ropes hale heavily ;
Yea, even all the massive temple-fronts
With all their columns and huge effigies,
The pyramids and Memnon and the Sphinx,
This Cairo and the City of the Greek
As Memphis and the hundred-gated Thebes,

¹ Reprinted by permission from the *Fortnightly Review*.

Sais and Denderah of Isis queen ;
Have grown because I fed them with full life,
And flourish only while I feed them still.
For if I stint my fertilising flood,
Gaunt famine reaps among the sons of men
Who have not corn to reap for all they sowed,
And blight and languishment are everywhere ;
And when I have withdrawn or turned aside
To other realms my ever-flowing streams,
The old realms withered from their old renown,
The sands came over them, the desert-sands
Incessantly encroaching, numberless
Beyond my water-drops, and buried them,
And all is silence, solitude, and death,
Exanimate silence while the waste winds howl
Over the sad immeasurable waste.

Dusk memories haunt me of an infinite past,
Ages and cycles brood above my springs,
Though I remember not my primal birth.
So ancient is my being and august,
I know not anything more venerable ;
Unless, perchance, the vaulting skies that hold
The sun and moon and stars that shine on me ;
The air that breathes upon me with delight ;
And Earth, All-Mother, all-beneficent,

Who held her mountains forth like opulent breasts
To cradle me and feed me with their snows,
And hollowed out the great sea to receive
My overplus of flowing energy :
Blessèd for ever be our Mother Earth.

Only, the mountains that must feed my springs
Year after year and every year with snows
As they have fed innumerable years,
These mountains they are evermore the same,
Rooted and motionless ; the solemn heavens
Are evermore the same in stable rest ;
The sun and moon and stars that shine on me
Are evermore the same although they move :
I solely, moving ever without pause,
Am evermore the same and not the same ;
Pouring myself away into the sea,
And self-renewing from the farthest heights ;
Ever-fresh waters streaming down and down,
The one old Nilus constant through their change.

The creatures also whom I breed and feed
Perpetually perish and dissolve,
And other creatures like them take their place,
To perish in their turn and be no more :
My affluent waters perish not from life,

A Voice from the Nile.

Absorbed into the ever-living sea
Whose life is in their full replenishment.

Of all these creatures whom I breed and feed,
One only with his works is strange to me,
Is strange and admirable and pitiable,
As homeless where all others are at home.
My crocodiles are happy in my slime,
And bask and seize their prey, each for itself,
And leave their eggs to hatch in the hot sun,
And die, their lives fulfilled, and are no more,
And others bask and prey and leave their eggs.
My doves they build their nests, each pair its own,
And feed their callow young, each pair its own,
None serves another, each one serves itself ;
All glean alike about my fields of grain,
And all the nests they build them are alike,
And are the self-same nests they built of old
Before the rearing of the pyramids,
Before great Hekatompylos was reared ;
Their cooing is the cooing soft and sweet
That murmured plaintively at evening-tide
In pillared Karnak as its pillars rose ;
And they are happy floating through my palms.

But Man, the admirable, the pitiable,
These sad-eyed peoples of the sons of men,

Are as the children of an alien race
Planted among my children, not at home,
Changelings aloof from all my family.
The one is servant and the other lord,
And many myriads serve a single lord :
So was it when the pyramids were reared,
And sphinxes and huge columns and wrought stones
Were haled long lengthening leagues adown my banks
By hundreds groaning with the stress of toil
And groaning under the taskmaster's scourge,
With many falling foredone by the way,
Half-starved on lentils, onions, and scant bread ;
So is it now with these poor fellaheen
To whom my annual bounty brings fierce toil
With scarce enough of food to keep-in life.
They build mud huts and spacious palaces ;
And in the huts the moiling millions dwell,
And in the palaces their sumptuous lords
Pampered with all the choicest things I yield :
Most admirable, most pitiable Man.

Also their peoples ever are at war,
Slaying and slain, burning and ravaging,
And one yields to another and they pass,
While I flow evermore the same great Nile,
The ever-young and ever-ancient Nile :

The swarthy is succeeded by the dusk,
The dusky by the pale, the pale again
By sunburned turbaned tribes long-linen-robed :
And with these changes all things change and pass,
All things but Me and this old Land of mine,
Their dwellings, habitudes and garbs, and tongues :
I hear strange voices ;¹ never more the voice
Austere priests chanted to the boat of death
Gliding across the Acherusian lake,
Or satraps parleyed in the Pharaoh's halls ;
Never the voice of mad Cambyzes' hosts,
Never the voice of Alexander's Greece,
Never the voice of Cæsar's haughty Rome :
And with the peoples and the languages,
With the great Empires still the great Creeds change ;
They shift, they change, they vanish like thin dreams,
As unsubstantial as the mists that rise
After my overflow from out my fields,
In silver fleeces, golden volumes, rise,
And melt away before the mounting sun ;
While I flow onward solely permanent
Amidst their swiftly-passing pageantry.

Poor men, most admirable, most pitiable,
With all their changes all their great Creeds change :

¹ " and Nilus heareth strange voices."—*Sir Thomas Browne.*

For Man, this alien in my family,
Is alien most in this, to cherish dreams
And brood on visions of eternity,
And build religions in his brooding brain
And in the dark depths awe-full of his soul.
My other children live their little lives,
Are born and reach their prime and slowly fail,
And all their little lives are self-fulfilled ;
They die and are no more, content with age
And weary with infirmity. But Man
Has fear and hope and phantasy and awe,
And wistful yearnings and unsated loves,
That strain beyond the limits of his life,
And therefore Gods and Demons, Heaven and Hell :
This Man, the admirable, the pitiable.

Lo, I look backward some few thousand years,
And see men hewing temples in my rocks
With seated forms gigantic fronting them,
And solemn labyrinthine catacombs
With tombs all pictured with fair scenes of life
And scenes and symbols of mysterious death ;
And planting avenues of sphinxes forth,
Sphinxes couched calm, whose passionless regard
Sets timeless riddles to bewildered time,
Forth from my sacred banks to other fanes

Islanded in the boundless sea of air,
Upon whose walls and colonnades are carved
Tremendous hieroglyphs of secret things ;
I see embalming of the bodies dead
And judging of the disembodied souls ;
I see the sacred animals alive,
And statues of the various-headed gods,
Among them throned a woman and a babe,
The goddess crescent-horned, the babe divine.
Then I flow forward some few thousand years,
And see new temples shining with all grace,
Whose sculptured gods are beautiful human forms.
Then I flow forward not a thousand years,
And see again a woman and a babe,
The woman haloed and the babe divine ;
And everywhere that symbol of the cross
I knew aforetime in the ancient days,
The emblem then of life, but now of death.
Then I flow forward some few hundred years,
And see again the crescent, now supreme
On lofty cupolas and minarets
Whence voices sweet and solemn call to prayer.
So the men change along my changeless stream,
And change their faiths ; but I yield all alike
Sweet water for their drinking, sweet as wine,
And pure sweet water for their lustral rites :

For thirty generations of my corn
Outlast a generation of my men,
And thirty generations of my men
Outlast a generation of their gods :
O admirable, pitiable Man,
My child yet alien in my family.

And I through all these generations flow
Of corn and men and gods, all-bountiful,
Perennial through their transientness, still fed
By earth with waters in abundancy ;
And as I flowed here long before they were,
So may I flow when they no longer are,
Most like the serpent of eternity :
Blessèd for ever be our Mother Earth.

November, 1881.



RICHARD FOREST'S MIDSUMMER NIGHT.



I.

THE sun is setting in pale lucid gold,
From out that strange sweet green
The heavens through half their lucid breadth unfold,
Unfathomably serene.

The moon is risen, formless, vague and wan,
Until the glory wane ;
Less moon as yet than thin white cloud, whereon
Young yearning eyes fix fain.

The splendour ripples on the broad calm bay
Where still some white sails gleam
Like sea-birds in the offing far away,
Suspended as in dream.

The wavelets whisper on the soft sands wide,
Soothing their thread of foam,
The silver fringe of the advancing tide,
Nearer and nearer home.

The hammers ringing on the building ships
Are ceasing from their chime ;
Our toils are closing in this sweet eclipse
Of tranquil vesper-time.

O day slow-dying in the golden west,
O far flushed clouds above,
O slowly rising moon, your infinite rest
Brings infinite longing love.

II.

But what come forth with the dark,
With the dusk of the eve and the night ?
When the lessening sails of that single barque
Shall be wholly lost to sight,
And the latest song of the latest lark
Shall be mute in the mute moonlight.

All the stars come forth on high
Like spirits that cast their shrouds,
And the solemn depths of the darkening sky
Are filled with their radiant crowds,
And Hesper, lovely as Love's own eye,
Shines beneath purple clouds ;

And the maidens and youths on earth,
On the shores of the sands and the piers,

Like a sudden bountiful beautiful birth,
In the flower of their happy years,
With babble and laughter and musical mirth
Under the silent spheres.

With the silent stars above,
And the maidens and youths below
With their murmurs sweeter than voice of the dove,
By the calm sea's splash and flow,
All the soft warm air breathes bliss and love
In the sunset's after-glow.

For the burning hours are past,
And the toils of the day are done,
And the peace of the night is come at last,
And the moon succeeds the sun ;
And the pulses of Heaven and Earth throb fast,
All the thousands throbbing as one.

III.

Oh, a myriad stars may shine,
But ever the one sole Moon,
The Queen of the stars and the night divine,
The Queen most fair and boon,
For her mystical shine is Love's best wine,
And her midnight Love's own noon.

I have heard that the smallest star
Is a much more mighty sphere,
Than the regnant moon in her silver car
That we love and worship here ;
But behold, the star it is faint and far,
While our moon is bright and near.

Let the star in its distant skies
Burn glorious and great,
A sun of life to the far-off eyes
In the planets that swell its state ;
But it sways not the tides of our seas as it rides,
Nor the tides of our human fate.

So, there on the shining sand,
And there on the long curved pier,
Fair ladies circle fulgent and grand,
Each in her proper sphere ;
But the sun so far is a little star,
While my Love is near and dear :

Is near and dear and bright,
The Queen of my Heavens above,
The pure sweet light of my darkest night,
My Lotus, my Lily, my Dove ;
And my pulses flow and thrill and glow
In the sway of Her splendid love.

IV.

Farewell, fair margent of the sea,
Fair city of the noble bay ;
I seek my Love who looks for me,
Not far away, not far away,
Over the hill of wood and lea,
And near that other bay adown
The winding valley lone and lown.

The valley with its tethered kine,
The orchard plots and fields of grain,
So tranquil in the broad sunshine,
More tranquil now the high stars reign,
And tranquil most and most divine
When over it comes floating soon
The mystic splendour of the moon.

The cottage nestles sheltered well
Among rich apple-trees, embowered
In its side-nook of dimpled dell ;
Roses and jasmine starry-flowered
Clothe all its front ; the tide's long swell
Sounds up the valley slow and calm,
To ebb away a dying psalm.

Through clouds of delicate blossom white
The red tiles burn with steadfast glow,

Or through green leaves and apples bright
And hoary stems a-slanting low,
When morning crowns the eastern height ;
The blue smoke quivering up the air
Its slender breath of household prayer ;
The sweet flowers flush and glow and yearn,
With wild bees humming in their bloom,
The lane comes winding like a burn
Through banks of golden gorse and broom,
And edged with grass and fringed with fern ;
The rapturous larks are singing high
In all the regions of the sky.

But that is day, these days of June
A-verging into hot July,
And this is night, more rich and boon,
Although its hours so swiftly fly :
O light of lovers, gracious moon,
My own Moon waits me full of love,
Brighter than all heaven's stars above.

V.

Ere the road curves up through the shade
With its transverse moonlight bars,
While above in the leafy gloom of the glade
Hang the glittering fruits of the stars ;

Let me pause for a moment and turn and look down
Beyond all the villa clumps duskily brown,
And beyond all the pale yellow lamps of the town ;

To the sea and the noble bay
Lulled asleep in the broad moonshine ;
To the shore where our youths and our maidens stray
On the sands and the pier's long line,
Like a swarm of bees that suspend their flight
To gather the honey of love and delight
In the heart of the azure-leaved Flower of the Night.

Like a swarm of buzzing bees
Whose busy murmurs float
On the wide-wafting wings of the southerly breeze,
Merged into one vague note :
They are drunk with the honey of love and of bliss,
And they throb with the stars of the azure abyss,
And the air is as soft as a tremulous kiss.

I shall find Her all alone
At the wicket of garden and lane,
Or out of the porch by the rose o'ergrown
She will glide all flushed and fain :
So gather your honey, you bees that swarm,
I drink-in my nectar all golden and warm
From a flower-cup the fairest in colour and form.

VI.

Do I love you more for your own grand sake,
Or more for the bliss you bring to me ?
You big black arms of the elms that make
The little white arms cling to me.

Do I love you more for your own sweet sake,
Or more for my heart's desire to me ?
You flowers of the night whose perfumes make
The sweetest breath suspire to me.

Do I love you more for your own dear sake,
Or more for the joys that rill through me ?
You nightingales whose voices make
The dearest soft voice thrill through me.

Do I love you more for your own bright sake,
Or more for the joys that stream on me ?
You stars of the heaven whose glances make
The brightest moist eyes beam on me.

Do I love you more for your own dear sake,
Or more for the bliss possessing me ?
You whispering waves of the sea that make
The dear lips mute caressing me.

Do I love you more for your own pure sake,
Or more for the Heavens you declare to me ?

You naked moon, whose splendours make
The soul of her pure love bare to me.

Oh, I love you all for your own love's sake,
And my love of my Love and her love to me,
Dear earth and sea and heavens that make
This life as the life above to me.

VII.

She is not there at the rustic gate,
Nor in the garden, nor in the porch :
Lucy ! the hour is not yet late,
The moon, our this night's signal torch,
The beacon-fire of our hearts' desire,
Over the wooded promontory
Shines on our bay in all her glory.

Good Father nods in his old arm-chair,
A-dozing over his evening pipe,
The old brown jug at his elbow there
Half-full of the old ale humming-ripe ;
For his work is done with the set o' the sun,
And he settles down content and placid,
Sweetness without one drop of acid.

And our little Mother upright sits,
Under her glasses glancing keen

And listening sharp as she knits and knits ;
Nothing unheard, nothing unseen ;
Her work is not done with the set o' the sun.

And she never no
Until her head in

Or else the dear old co
Some game they hav
Cribbage,—and how sh
Perhaps Don Pedro
And Lucy and I must
Which shall prove
Or youth or eld at

But Lucy, Lucy, where
Not in the garden, n
Not in the porch a-lool
Not at the parlour-la
Can she sew or read ar
How the stars are
And I am without

O Lucy, Lucy ! can yo
O'er the loves in a bc
Out from the back-shac
Lucy is here ! Lucy
Dancing light in her ey

White rose in her hair, red rose in her fingers,
How she hastens !—and how she lingers !

Oh, the smile of your mouth !—but I want my own
kiss !

Oh, the flush of your face !—but your head on my
breast !

Oh, the rose in your yellow hair fragrant with bliss !

Oh, the rose in your hand by my own hand caressed !

O dear form I enlace in this perfect embrace,

My Love all a-tremble with passion and yearning,
While under my kisses the pure neck is burning !

VIII.

Oh, how the nights are short,
These heavenly nights of June !
The long day all amort
With toil, the time to court
So stinted in its boon !

In winter brief work-days,
Long rest-nights dark and cold,
Dank mists and miry ways,
Black boughs and leafless sprays,
No sweet birds singing bold.

I find this order strange,
And not at all the right ;

Not thus would I arrange :
May I propose a change
In seasons, day and night ?

Cold days, warm nights, be long,
Cold nights, warm days, be brief :
Warm nights of scent and song,
Nights long as love is strong,—
Oh, Love should have relief !

Yet some days we would spare,
Long days of love and rest,
So long, so rich, so rare,
When but to breathe the air
Is to be fully blest.

When deep in fern we lie
With golden gorse above ;
Deep sapphire sea and sky,
Ringing of larks on high,
Our whole world breathing love.

Long days of perfect rest !
Long days of infinite bliss !
Your head upon my breast ;
Possessing and possessed,
Dissolving in a kiss.

IX.

Oh, how the nights are short,
 These heavenly nights of June !
The long hot day amort
With toil, the time to court
 So stinted in its boon !

But three or four brief hours
 Between the afterglow
And dawnlight ; while the flowers
Are dreaming in their bowers,
 And birds their song forego ;

And in the noon of night,
 As in the noon of day,
Flowers close on their delight,
Birds nestle from their flight,
 Deep stillness holdeth sway :

Only the nightingales
 Yet sing to moon and stars,
Although their full song fails ;
The corn-crake never quails,
 But through the silence jars.

So few brief hours of peace ;
 And only one for us,

Alone, in toil's surcease,
To feed on love's increase :
It is too cruel thus !

Did little Mother chide
Because our sewing dropped
And we sat dreamy-eyed ?
Dear Mother, good betide,
The scolding must be stopped.

Dear Mother, good and true,
All-loving while you blame,
When spring brings skies of blue
And buds and flowers anew,
I come in with my claim !

I claim my Love, my Own,
Yet ever yours the while,
Under whose care hath grown
The sweetest blossom blown
In all our flower-loved isle.

The Spring renews its youth
And youth renews its Spring :
Love's wildest dreams are truth,
Magic is sober sooth ;
Charm of the Magic Ring !

X.

As we gaze and gaze on the sleeping sea
 Beneath the moon's soft splendour,
The wide expanse inspires a trance
 Most solemn and most tender.

The heavens all silent with their stars,
 The sweet air hardly breathing,
The liquid light of ripples bright
 Wreathing and interwreathing.

The tide self-poised now at the full,
 Scarce swaying, almost soundless ;
The sea between twin skies serene,
 Calm, fathomless and boundless.

What specks are we in this vast world,
 Our little lives how fleeting !
While star on star is throbbing far,
 What matter two hearts beating ?

How many many million years
 Those living lights supernal
Shone ere our birth on this small earth !
 Yet they are not eternal.

How many many million years,
 When we have passed death's portal,

Those stars shall shine as now divine !
Yet they are not immortal.

Deep as may be the deepest sea,
Yet deeper is our love, dear ;
Our souls dilate with bliss as great
As all the heavens above, dear.

We float in dream until we seem
With all these worlds revolving ;
Our love intense, our bliss immense,
Throughout the whole dissolving.

A calm profound and infinite
Within us as without us ;
Our pulses beat in union sweet
With all the Life about us.

We are the whole World yet ourself
By some divine illusion ;
The I in Thee and Thou in Me
By mystic interfusion.

Our soul-tides poising at the full,
Scarce swaying, tranced in glory,
Have reached the clime of timeless time
Amid the transitory.

We have not spoken now so long,
But mute in still caressing,
Without one kiss have breathed the bliss
Too perfect for expressing.

XI.

Good night ; good night ! how truly hath been sung,
It is good night then only when the tongue
Need never say Good night ;
When hearts may beat together till the morrow
Dawns on long hours fulfilled of bliss not sorrow,
And eyes that close for darkness, frayed and stung
By the so less sweet light.

Good night ; good night ! I leave you to sweet sleep
And lovely dreams of love divinely deep ;
May this be your good night :
My straining arms reluctantly surrender
Into the arms of sleep divinely tender
My Dearest thus, to safely surely keep
Until the morn shines bright.

Good night ; good night ! I leave you and go back
Into the silent city ; and, alack !

Can this be my good night ?
Yet Love, Bliss, Memory, radiant Hope are burning
In brain all throbbing and in heart all yearning,

As moon and stars in skies that else were black
With glorifying might.

Good night ; good night ! If parting when so brief
Is yet so bitter, what would be our grief

With Good-bye for Good night !—

Farewell ! for weeks, for months, for years, for ever !
Alas for Lovers whom the Fates thus sever !

Where can they look for comfort or relief ?

Oh, worse than mortal blight !

Good night ; good night ! for more than twenty hours !
The sleeping time of all the birds and flowers,

For whom it is good night ;

The waking time of all the sun's wide glory :

Ere yet the moon has crowned yon promontory

To-morrow evening, back to Eden's bowers

I come with swerveless flight.

Good night ; good night ! my Life, my Love, my Bliss !
But one more last embrace, one more last kiss,

To sweeten sour Good night :

O dear Heavens, have her in your holy keeping !

O moon and stars, watch tenderly her sleeping !

O sun, thou regent of our World-abyss,

Awake her to delight !

INSOMNIA.

“ Sleepless himself to give to others sleep.”

“ He giveth His beloved sleep.”



I HEARD the sounding of the midnight hour ;
The others one by one had left the room,
In calm assurance that the gracious power
Of Sleep's fine alchemy would bless the gloom,
Transmuting all its leaden weight to gold,
To treasures of rich virtues manifold,
New strength, new health, new life ;
Just weary enough to nestle softly, sweetly,
Into divine unconsciousness, completely
Delivered from the world of toil and care and strife.

Just weary enough to feel assured of rest,
Of Sleep's divine oblivion and repose,
Renewing heart and brain for richer zest,
Of waking life when golden morning glows,
As young and pure and glad as if the first
That ever on the void of darkness burst
With ravishing warmth and light ;
On dewy grass and flowers and blithe birds singing,

And shining waters, all enraptured springing,
Fragrance and shine and song, out of the womb of night.

But I with infinite weariness outworn,
Haggard with endless nights unblest by sleep,
Ravaged by thoughts unutterably forlorn,
Plunged in despairs unfathomably deep,
Went cold and pale and trembling with affright
Into the desert vastitude of Night,
Arid and wild and black ;
Foreboding no oasis of sweet slumber,
Counting beforehand all the countless number
Of sands that are its minutes on my desolate track.

And so I went, the last, to my drear bed,
Aghast as one who should go down to lie
Among the blissfully unconscious dead,
Assured that as the endless years flowed by
Over the dreadful silence and deep gloom
And dense oppression of the stifling tomb,
He only of them all,
Nerveless and impotent to madness, never
Could hope oblivion's perfect trance for ever :
An agony of life eternal in death's pall.

But that would be for ever, without cure !—
And yet the agony be not more great ;

Supreme fatigue and pain, while they endure,
 Into Eternity their time translate ;
Be it of hours and days or countless years,
And boundless æons, it alike appears
 To the crushed victim's soul ;
Utter despair foresees no termination,
But feels itself of infinite duration ;
The smallest fragment instant comprehends the whole.

The absolute of torture as of bliss
 Is timeless, each transcending time and space ;
The one an infinite obscure abyss,
 The other an eternal Heaven of grace.—
Keeping a little lamp of glimmering light
Companion through the horror of the night,
 I laid me down aghast
As *he* of all who pass death's quiet portal
Malignantly reserved alone immortal,
In consciousness of bale that must for ever last.

I laid me down and closed my heavy eyes,
 As if sleep's mockery might win true sleep ;
And grew aware, with awe but not surprise,
 Blindly aware through all the silence deep,
Of some dark Presence watching by my bed,
The awful image of a nameless dread ;

But I lay still fordone ;
And felt its Shadow on me dark and solemn
And steadfast as a monumental column,
And thought drear thoughts of Doom, and heard the
bells chime One.

And then I raised my weary eyes and saw,
By some slant moonlight on the ceiling thrown
And faint lamp-gleam, that Image of my awe,
Still as a pillar of basaltic stone,
But all enveloped in a sombre shroud
Except the wan face drooping heavy-browed,
With sad eyes fixed on mine ;
Sad weary yearning eyes, but fixed remorseless
Upon my eyes yet wearier, that were forceless
To bear the cruel pressure ; cruel, unmalign.

Wherefore I asked for what I knew too well :
O ominous midnight Presence, What art Thou ?
Whereto in tones that sounded like a knell :
“ I am the Second Hour, appointed now
To watch beside thy slumberless unrest.”
Then I : Thus both, unlike, alike unblest ;
For I should sleep, you fly :
Are not those wings beneath thy mantle moulded ?
O Hour ! unfold those wings so straitly folded,
And urge thy natural flight beneath the moonlit sky.

“ My wings shall open when your eyes shall close

In real slumber from this waking drear ;

Your wild unrest is my enforced repose ;

Ere I move hence you must not know me here.”

Could not your wings fan slumber through my brain,

Soothing away its weariness and pain ?

“ Your sleep must stir my wings :

Sleep, and I bear you gently on my pinions

Athwart my span of hollow night's dominions,

Whence hour on hour shall bear to morning's golden
springs.”

That which I ask of you, you ask of me,

O weary Hour, thus standing sentinel

Against your nature, as I feel and see

Against my own your form immovable :

Could I bring Sleep to set you on the wing,

What other thing so gladly would I bring ?

Truly the Poet saith :

If that is best whose absence we deplore most,

Whose presence in our longings is the foremost,

What blessings equal Sleep save only love and death ?

I let my lids fall, sick of thought and sense,

But felt that Shadow heavy on my heart ;

And saw the night before me an immense

Black waste of ridge-walls, hour by hour apart,

Dividing deep ravines : from ridge to ridge
Sleep's flying hour was an aërial bridge ;

But I, whose hours stood fast,
Must climb down painfully each steep side hither,
And climb more painfully each steep side thither,
And so make one hour's span for years of travail last.

Thus I went down into that first ravine,
Wearily, slowly, blindly, and alone,
Staggering, stumbling, sinking depths unseen,
Shaken and bruised and gashed by stub and
stone ;
And at the bottom paven with slipperiness,
A torrent-brook rushed headlong with such stress
Against my feeble limbs,
Such fury of wave and foam and icy bleakness
Buffeting insupportably my weakness
That when I would recall, dazed memory swirls and
swims.

How I got through I know not, faint as death ;
And then I had to climb the awful scarp,
Creeping with many a pause for panting breath,
Clinging to tangled root and rock-jut sharp ;
Perspiring with faint chills instead of heat,
Trembling, and bleeding hands and knees and feet ;

Falling, to rise anew ;
Until, with lamentable toil and travel
Upon the ridge of arid sand and gravel
I lay supine half-dead and heard the bells chime Two ;

And knew a change of Watchers in the room,
Without a stir or sound beside my bed ;
Only the tingling silence of the gloom,
The muffled pulsing of the night's deep dread ;
And felt an image mightier to appal,
And looked ; the moonlight on the bed-foot wall
And corniced ceiling white
Was slanting now ; and in the midst stood solemn
And hopeless as a black sepulchral column
A steadfast shrouded Form, the Third Hour of the night.

The fixed regard implacably austere,
Yet none the less ineffably forlorn.
Something transcending all my former fear
Came jarring through my shattered frame outworn :
I knew that crushing rock could not be stirred ;
I had no heart to say a single word,
But closed my eyes again ;
And set me shuddering to the task stupendous
Of climbing down and up that gulph tremendous
Unto the next hour-ridge beyond Hope's farthest ken.

Men sigh and plain and wail how life is brief :
 Ah yes, our bright eternities of bliss
Are transient, rare, minute beyond belief,
 Mere star-dust meteors in Time's night-abyss ;
Ah no, our black eternities intense
Of bale are lasting, dominant, immense,
 As Time which is their breath ;
The memory of the bliss is yearning sorrow,
The memory of the bale clouds every morrow
Darkening through nights and days unto the night of
 Death.

No human words could paint my travail sore
 In the thick darkness of the next ravine,
Deeper immeasurably than that before ;
 When hideous agonies, unheard, unseen,
In overwhelming floods of torture roll,
And horrors of great darkness drown the soul,
 To be is not to be
In memory save as ghastliest impression,
And chaos of demoniacal possession. . . .
I shuddered on the ridge, and heard the bells chime
 Three.

And like a pillar of essential gloom,
 Most terrible in stature and regard,

Black in the moonlight filling all the room
The Image of the Fourth Hour, evil-starred,
Stood over me ; but there was Something more,
Something behind It undiscerned before,

More dreadful than Its dread,
Which overshadowed it as with a fateful
Inexorable fascination hateful,—

A wan and formless Shade from regions of the dead.

I shut my eyes against that spectral Shade,
Which yet allured them with a deadly charm,
And that black Image of the Hour, dismayed

By such tremendous menacing of harm ;
And so into the gulph as into Hell ;
Where what immeasurable depths I fell,

With seizures of the heart
Whose each clutch seemed the end of all pulsation,
And tremors of exanimate prostration,
Are horrors in my soul that never can depart.

If I for hope or wish had any force,

It was that I might rush down sharply hurled
From rock to rock until a mangled corse

Down with the fury of the torrent whirled,
The fury of black waters and white foam,
To where the homeless find their only home,

In the immense void Sea,
Whose isles are worlds, surrounding, unsurrounded,
Whose depths no mortal plummet ever sounded,
Beneath all surface storm calm in Eternity.

Such hope or wish was as a feeble spark,
A little lamp's pale glimmer in a tomb,
To just reveal the hopeless deadly dark,
And wordless horrors of my soul's fixed doom :
Yet some mysterious instinct obstinate,
Blindly unconscious as a law of Fate,
Still urged me on and bore
My shattered being through the unfear'd peril
Of death less hateful than the life as sterile :
I shuddered on the ridge, and heard the bells chime Four.

The Image of that Fifth Hour of the night
Was blacker in the moonlight now aslant
Upon its left than on its shrouded right ;
And over and behind It, dominant,
The Shadow not Its shadow cast its spell,
Most vague and dim and wan and terrible,
Death's ghastly aureole,
Pregnant with overpowering fascination,
Commanding by repulsive instigation,
Despair's envenomed anodyne to tempt the Soul.

I closed my eyes, but could no longer keep
Under that Image and most awful Shade,
Supine in mockery of blissful sleep,
Delirious with such fierce thirst unallayed ;
Of all worst agonies the most unblest
Is passive agony of wild unrest :
Trembling and faint I rose,
And dressed with painful efforts, and descended
With furtive footsteps and with breath suspended,
And left the slumbering house with my unslumbering
woes.

Constrained to move through the unmoving hours,
Accurst from rest because the hours stood still ;
Feeling the hands of the Infernal Powers
Heavy upon me for enormous ill,
Inscrutable intolerable pain,
Against which mortal pleas and prayers are vain,
Gasps of dying breath,
And human struggles, dying spasms yet vainer :
Renounce defence when Doom is the Arraigner ;
Let impotence of Life subside appeased in Death.

I paced the silent and deserted streets
In cold dark shade and chillier moonlight grey ;
Pondering a dolorous series of defeats
And black disasters from life's opening day,

Invested with the shadow of a doom
That filled the Spring and Summer with a gloom
 Most wintry bleak and drear ;
Gloom from within as from a sulphurous censer
Making the glooms without for ever denser,
To blight the buds and flowers and fruitage of my year.

Against a bridge's stony parapet
 I leaned, and gazed into the waters black ;
And marked an angry morning red and wet
 Beneath a livid and enormous rack
Glare out confronting the belated moon,
Huddled and wan and feeble as the swoon
 Of featureless Despair :
When some stray workman, half-asleep but lusty,
Passed urgent through the rainpour wild and gusty,
I felt a ghost already, planted watching there.

As phantom to its grave, or to its den
 Some wild beast of the night when night is sped,
I turned unto my homeless home again
 To front a day only less charged with dread
Than that dread night ; and after day, to front
Another night of—what would be the brunt ?
 I put the thought aside,
To be resumed when common life unfolded

In common daylight had my brain remoulded ;
Meanwhile the flaws of rain refreshed and fortified.

The day passed, and the night ; and other days,
And other nights ; and all of evil doom ;
The sun-hours in a sick bewildering haze,
The star-hours in a thick enormous gloom,
With rending lightnings and with thunder-knells ;
The ghastly hours of all the timeless Hells :—
Bury them with their bane !

I look back on the words already written,
And writhe by cold rage stung, by self-scorn smitten,
They are so weak and vain and infinitely inane. . . .

“How from those hideous Malebolges deep
I ever could win back to upper earth,
Restored to human nights of blessed sleep
And healthy waking with the new day's birth?”—
How do men climb back from a swoon whose stress,
Crushing far deeper than all consciousness,
Is deep as deep death seems?
Who can the steps and stages mete and number
By which we re-emerge from nightly slumber?—
Our poor vast petty life is one dark maze of dreams.

March, 1882.

HE HEARD HER SING.



WE were now in the midmost Maytime, in the full green
flood of the Spring,
When the air is sweet all the daytime with the blossoms
and birds that sing ;
When the air is rich all the night, and richest of all in
its noon
When the nightingales pant the delight and keen stress
of their love to the moon ;
When the almond and apple and pear spread wavering
wavelets of snow
In the light of the soft warm air far-flushed with a delicate glow ;
When the towering chestnuts uphold their masses of
spires red or white,
And the pendulous tresses of gold of the slim laburnum
burn bright,
And the lilac guardeth the bowers with the gleam of a
lifted spear,
And the scent of the hawthorn flowers breathes all the
new life of the year,

And the linden's tender pink bud by the green of the
leaf is o'errun,
And the bronze-beech shines like blood in the light of
the morning sun,
And the leaf-buds seem spangling some network of
gossamer flung on the elm,
And the hedges are filling their fretwork with every
sweet green of Spring's realm ;
And the flowers are everywhere budding and blowing
about our feet,
The green of the meadows star-studding and the bright
green blades of the wheat.

An evening and night of song. For first when I left
the town,
And took the lane that is long and came out on the
breeze-swept down,
The sunset heavens were all ringing wide over the golden
gorse
With the skylarks' rapturous singing, a revel of larks in
full force,
A revel of larks in the raptures surpassing all raptures of
Man,
Who ponders the blessings he captures and finds in each
blessing some ban.

And then I went on down the dale in the light of the
afterglow,
In that strange light green and pale and serene and
pathetic and slow
In its fading round to the north, while the light of the
unseen moon
From the east comes brightening forth an ever-increasing
boon.
And there in the cottage my Alice, through the hours so
short and so long,
Kept filled to the brim love's chalice with the wine of
music and song :
And first with colossal Beethoven, the gentlest spirit
sublime
Of the harmonies interwoven, Eternity woven with Time ;
Of the melodies slowly and slowly dissolving away through
the soul,
While it dissolves with them wholly and our being is
lost in the Whole ;
As gentle as Dante the Poet, for only the lulls of the stress
Of the mightiest spirits can know it, this ineffable gentle-
ness :
And then with the delicate tender phantastic dreamer of
night,
Whose splendour is starlike splendour and his light a
mystic moonlight,

Nocturn on nocturn dreaming while the mind floats far
in the haze
And the dusk and the shadow and gleaming of a realm
that has no days :
And then she sang ballads olden, ballads of love and of
woe,
Love all burningly golden, grief with heart's-blood in its
flow ;
Those ballads of Scotland that thrill you, keen from the
heart to the heart,
Till their pathos is seeming to kill you, with an exquisite
bliss in the smart.

And then we went out of the valley and over the spur
of the hill,
And down by a woodland alley where the sprinkled
moonlight lay still ;
For the breeze in the boughs was still and the breeze was
still in the sprays,
And the leaves had scarcely a thrill in the stream of the
silver rays,
But looked as if drawn on the sky or etched with a
graver keen,
Sharp shadows thrown from on high deep out of the
azure serene :

And a certain copse we knew, where never in Maytime
fails,

While the night distils sweet dew, the song of the night-
ingales :

And there together we heard the lyrical drama of love
Of the wonderful passionate bird which swelleth the
heart so above

All other thought of this life, all other care of this earth,
Be it of pleasure or strife, be it of sorrow or mirth,
Saving the one intense imperious passion supreme
Kindling the soul and the sense, making the world but
a dream,

The dream of an aching delight and a yearning afar and
afar,

While the music thrills all the void night to the loftiest
pulsating star :—

“Love, love only, for ever ; love with its torture and
bliss ;

All the world’s glories can never equal two souls in one
kiss.”

And when I had bidden farewell to my Love at the
cottage door,

For a night and a day farewell, for a night and a day
and no more,

I went down to the shining strand of our own belovèd
bay,
To the shore of soft white sand caressed by the pure
white spray,
In the arms of the hills serene, clothed from the base to
the crest
With garments of manifold green, curving to east and to
west ;
And high in the pale blue south where the clouds were
white as wool,
Over the little bay-mouth the moon shone near the
full ;
And I walked by the waves' soft moan, for my heart was
beyond control,
And I needed to be alone with the night and my love
and my soul,
And I could not think of sleep in the moonlight broad
and clear,
For a music solemn and deep filled all my spirit's sphere,
A music interwoven of all that night I had heard,
From the music of mighty Beethoven to the song of the
little brown bird.

And thus as I paced the shore beneath the azure abyss,
And my soul thrilled more and more with a yearning and
sadness of bliss,

A voice came over the water from over the eastern cape,
Like the voice of some ocean daughter wailing a lover's
escape,—

A voice so plaintive and distant, as faint as a wounded
dove,

Whose wings are scarcely resistant to the air beneath and
above,

Wavering, panting, urging from the farthest east to the
west,

Over some wild sea surging in the hope forlorn of its nest ;
A voice that quivered and trembled, with falls of a broken
heart,

And then like that dove reassembled its forces to play
out its part ;

Till it came to a fall that was dying, the end of an in-
finite grief,

A sobbing and throbbing and sighing that death was a
welcome relief :

And so there was silence once more, and the moonlight
looked sad as a pall,

And I stood entranced on the shore and marvelled what
next would befall.

And thus all-expectant abiding I waited not long, for soon
A boat came gliding and gliding out in the light of the
moon,

Gliding with muffled oars, slowly, a thin dark line,
Round from the shadowing shores into the silver shine
Of the clear moon westering now, and still drew on and on,
While the water before its prow breaking and glistening
shone,

Slowly in silence strange ; and the rower rowed till it lay
Afloat within easy range deep in the curve of the bay :
And besides the rower were two ; a Woman, who sat in
the stern,

And Her by her fame I knew, one of those fames that
burn,

Startling and kindling the world, one whose likeness we
everywhere see ;

And a man reclining half-curved with an indolent grace
at her knee,

The Signor, lord of her choice ; and he lightly touched
a guitar ;—

A guitar for that glorious voice ! Illumine the sun with
a star !

She sat superb and erect, stately, all-happy, serene,
Her right hand toying unchecked with the hair of that
page of a Queen ;

With her head and her throat and her bust like the bust
and the throat and the head

Of Her who has long been dust, of her who shall never
be dead,

Preserved by the potent art made trebly potent by love,
While the transient ages depart from under the heavens
above,—

Preserved in the colour and line on the canvas fulgently
flung

By Him the Artist divine who triumphed and vanished
so young :

Surely there rarely hath been a lot more to be envied in
life

Than thy lot, O FORNARINA, whom RAPHAEL'S heart
took to wife.

There was silence yet for a time save the tinkling capri-
cious and quaint,

Then She lifted her voice sublime, no longer tender and
faint,

Pathetic and tremulous, no ! but firm as a column it rose,
Rising solemn and slow with a full rich swell to the close,
Firm as a marble column soaring with noble pride

In a triumph of rapture solemn to some Hero deified ;

In a rapture of exultation made calm by its stress intense,

In a triumph of consecration and a jubilation immense.

And the Voice flowed on and on, and ever it swelled as
it poured,

Till the stars that throbbed as they shone seemed
throbbing with it in accord ;

Till the moon herself in my dream, still Empress of all
the night,
Was only that voice supreme translated into pure light :
And I lost all sense of the earth though I still had sense
of the sea ;
And I saw the stupendous girth of a tree like the Norse
World-Tree ;
And its branches filled all the sky, and the deep sea
watered its root,
And the clouds were its leaves on high and the stars were
its silver fruit ;
Yet the stars were the notes of the singing and the moon
was the voice of the song,
Through the vault of the firmament ringing and swelling
resistlessly strong ;
And the whole vast night was a shell for that music of
manifold might,
And was strained by the stress of the swell of the music
yet vaster than night.
And I saw as a crystal fountain whose shaft was a column
of light
More high than the loftiest mountain ascend the abyss
of the night ;
And its spray filled all the sky, and the clouds were the
clouds of its spray,
Which glittered in star-points on high and filled with pure
silver the bay ;

And ever in rising and falling it sang as it rose and it fell,
And the heavens with their pure azure walling all pulsed
with the pulse of its swell,
For the stars were the notes of the singing and the moon
was the voice of the song
Through the vault of the firmament ringing and swelling
ineffably strong ;
And the whole vast night was a shell for that music of
manifold might,
And was strained by the stress of the swell of the music
yet vaster than night :
And the fountain in swelling and soaring and filling be-
neath and above,
Grew flushed with red fire in outpouring, transmuting
great power into love,
Great power with a greater love flushing, immense and
intense and supreme,
As if all the World's heart-blood outgushing ensanguined
the trance of my dream ;
And the waves of its blood seemed to dash on the shore
of the sky to the cope
With the stress of the fire of a passion and yearning of
limitless scope,
Vast fire of a passion and yearning, keen torture of rap-
ture intense,
A most unendurable burning consuming the soul with
the sense :—

“ Love, love only, for ever ; love with its torture of bliss ;
All the world’s glories can never equal two souls in one
kiss :

Love, and ever love wholly ; love in all time and all
space ;

Life is consummate then solely in the death of a burn-
ing embrace.”

And at length when that Voice sank mute, and silence
fell over all

Save the tinkling thin of that lute, the deep heavens
rushed down like a pall,

The stars and the moon for a time with all their splen-
dours of light,

Were quenched with that Voice sublime, and great dark-
ness filled the night

When I felt again the scent of the night-flowers rich and
sweet,

As ere my senses went, and knew where I stood on my
feet,

And saw the yet-bright bay and the moon gone low in
my dream,

The boat had passed away with Her the Singer supreme ;
She was gone, the marvellous Singer whose wonderful
world-wide fame

Could never possibly bring her a tithe of her just acclaim.

And I wandered all night in a trance of rapture and
yearning and love,

And saw the dim grey expanse flush far with the dawn-
ing above ;

And I passed that copse in the night, but the nightin-
gales all were dumb

From their passionate aching delight, and perhaps who-
ever should come

On the morrow would find, I have read, under its bush
or its tree .

Some poor little brown bird dead, dead of its melody,
Slain by the agitation, by the stress and the strain of the
strife,

And the pang of the vain emulation in the music yet
dearer than life.

And I heard the skylarks singing high in the morning
sun,

All the sunrise heavens ringing as the sunset heavens had
done :

And ever I dreamed and pondered while over the frag-
rant soil,

My happy footsteps wandered before I resumed my
toil :—

Truly, my darling, my Alice, truly the whole night long
Have I filled to the brim love's chalice with the wine of
music and song.

I have passed and repassed your door from the singing
until the dawn

A dozen times and more, and ever the curtains drawn ;
And now that the morn is breaking out of the stillness
deep,

Sweet as my visions of waking be all your visions of sleep !
Could you but wake, O my dearest, a moment, and give
one glance,

Just a furtive peep the merest, to learn the day's advance !
For I must away up the dale and over the hill to my toil,
And the night's rich dreams grow pale in the working
day's turmoil ;

But to-night, O my darling, my Alice, till night it will not
be long,

We will fill to the brim love's chalice with the wine of
music and song ;

And never the memory fails of what I have learnt in my
dream

From the song of the nightingales and the song of the
Singer supreme :—

“Love, love only, for ever ; love with its torture and bliss ;
All the world's glories can never equal two souls in
one kiss :

Love, love ever and wholly ; love in all time and all space ;
Love is consummate then solely in the death of a burn-
ing embrace.”

February, 1882.

THE POET AND HIS MUSE.



I SIGHED unto my Muse, " O gentle Muse,
Would you but come and kiss my aching brow,
And thus a little life and joy infuse
Into my brain and heart so weary now ;
Into my heart so sad with emptiness
Even when unafflicted by the stress
Of all our kind's poor life ;
Into my brain so feeble and so listless,
Crushed down by burthens of dark thought resistless
Of all our want and woe and unresulting strife.

" Would you but come and kiss me on the brow,
Would you but kiss me on the pallid lips
That have so many years been songless now,
And on the eyes involved in drear eclipse ;
That thus the barren brain long overwrought
Might yield again some blossoms of glad thought,
And the long-mute lips sing,
And the long-arid eyes grow moist and tender
With some new vision of the ancient splendour
Of beauty and delight that lives in everything.

“ Would you but kiss me on the silent lips
And teach them thus to sing some new sweet song ;
Would you but kiss my eyes from their eclipse
With some new tale of old-world right and wrong :
Some song of love and joy or tender grief
Whose sweetness is its own divine relief,
Whose joy is golden bliss ;
Some solemn and impassioned antique story
Where love against dark doom burns out in glory,
Where life is freely staked to win one mutual kiss.

“ Would you but sing to me some new dear song
Of love in bliss or bale alike supreme ;
Some story of our old-world right and wrong
With noble passion burning through the theme :
What though the story be of darkest doom,
If loyal spirits shining through its gloom
Throb to us from afar ?
What though the song with heavy sorrows languish,
If loving hearts pulse to us through its anguish ?
Is not the whole black night enriched by one pure star ? ”

And lo ! She came, the ever-gentle Muse,
Sad as my heart, and languid as my brain ;
Too gentle in her loving to refuse,
Although her steps were weariness and pain ;

Although her eyes were blank and lustreless,
Although her form was clothed with heaviness
 And drooped beneath the weight ;
Although her lips were blanched from all their
 blooming,
Her pure face pallid as from long entombing,
Her bright regard and smile sombre and desolate.—

“ Sad as thy heart and languid as thy brain
 I come unto thy sighing through the gloom,
I come with mortal weariness and pain,
 I come as one compelled to leave her tomb :
Behold, am I not wrapt as in the cloud
Of death’s investiture and sombre shroud ?
 Am I not wan as death ?
Look at the withered leafage of my garland,
Is it not nightshade from the sad dim far land
Of night and old oblivion and no mortal breath ?

“ I come unto thy sighing through the gloom,
 My hair dishevelled dank with dews of night,
Reluctantly constrained to leave my tomb ;
 With eyes that have for ever lost their light ;
My vesture mouldering with deep death’s disgrace,
My heart as chill and bloodless as my face,
 My forehead like a stone ;

My spirit sightless as my eyes are sightless,
My inmost being nerveless, soulless, lightless,
My joyous singing voice a harsh sepulchral moan.

“My hair dishevelled dank with dewes of night,
From that far region of dim death I come,
With eyes and soul and spirit void of light,
With lips more sad in speech than stark and dumb :
Lo, you have ravaged me with dolorous thought
Until my brain was wholly overwrought,
Barren of flowers and fruit ;
Until my heart was bloodless for all passion,
Until my trembling lips could no more fashion
Sweet words to fit sweet airs of trembling lyre and lute.

“From the sad regions of dim death I come ;
We tell no tales there for our tale is told,
We sing no songs there for our lips are dumb,
Likewise our hearts and brains are graveyard mould ;
No wreaths of laurel, myrtle, ivy or vine,
About our pale and pulseless brows entwine,
And that sad frustrate realm
Nor amaranths nor asphodels can nourish,
But aconite and black-red poppies flourish
On such Lethean dewes as fair life overwhelm.

“We tell no tales more, we whose tale is told ;
As your brain withered and your heart grew chill

My heart and brain were turned to churchyard mould,
Wherefore my singing voice sank ever still ;
And I, all heart and brain and voice, am dead ;
It is my Phantom here beside your bed
That speaketh to you now ;
Though you exist still, a mere form inurning
The ashes of dead fires of thought and yearning,
Dead faith, dead love, dead hope, in hollow breast and
brow."

When It had moaned these words of hopeless doom,
The Phantom of the Muse once young and fair,
Pallid and dim from its disastrous tomb,
Of Her so sweet and young and *débonnaire*,
So rich of heart and brain and singing voice,
So quick to shed sweet tears and to rejoice
And smile with ravishing grace ;
My soul was stupified by its own reaping,
Then burst into a flood of passionate weeping,
Tears bitter as black blood streaming adown my face.

" O Muse, so young and sweet and glad and fair,
O Muse of hope and faith and joy and love,
O Muse so gracious and so *débonnaire*,
Darling of earth beneath and heaven above ;
If Thou art gone into oblivious death,
Why should I still prolong my painful breath ?

Why still exist, the urn
Holding of once-great fires the long-dead ashes,
No sole spark left of all their glow and flashes,
Fires never to rekindle more and shine and burn ?

“ O Muse of hope and faith and joy and love,
Soul of my soul, if Thou in truth art dead,
A mournful alien in our world above,
A Phantom moaning by my midnight bed ;
How can I be alive, a hollow form
With ashes of dead fires once bright and warm ?
What thing is worth my strife ?
The Past a great regret, the Present sterile,
The Future hopeless, with the further peril
Of withering down and down to utter death-in-life.

“ Soul of my soul, canst Thou indeed be dead ?
What mean for me if I accept their lore
Thy words, O Phantom moaning by my bed,
“ I cannot sing again for evermore ” ?
I nevermore can think or feel or dream
Or hope or love—the fatal loss supreme !
I am a soulless clod ;
No germ of life within me that surpasses
The little germs of weeds and flowers and grasses
Wherewith our liberal Mother decks the graveyard sod.

“I am half-torpid yet I spurn this lore,
I am long silent yet cannot avow
My singing voice is lost for evermore ;
For lo, this beating heart, this burning brow,
This spirit gasping in keen spasms of dread
And fierce revulsion that it is not dead,
This agony of the sting :
What soulless clod could have these tears and sobbings,
These terrors that are hopes, these passionate throb-
bings ?
Dear Muse, revive ! we yet may dream and love and
sing !”

February, 1882.



THE SLEEPER.¹



THE fire is in a steadfast glow,
The curtains drawn against the night ;
Upon the red couch soft and low
Between the fire and lamp alight
She rests half-sitting, half-reclining,
Encompassed by the cosy shining,
Her ruby dress with lace trimmed white.

Her left hand shades her drooping eyes
Against the fervour of the fire,
The right upon her cincture lies
In languid grace beyond desire,
A lily fallen among roses ;
So placidly her form reposes,
It scarcely seemeth to respire.

She is not surely all awake,
As yet she is not all asleep ;
The eyes with lids half open take
A startled deprecating peep

¹ Reprinted, by permission, from the *Cornhill Magazine*.

Of quivering drowsiness, then slowly
The lids sink back, before she wholly
Resigns herself to slumber deep.

The side-neck gleams so pure beneath
The underfringe of gossamer,
The tendrils of whose faery wreath
The softest sigh suppressed would stir.
The little pink-shell ear-rim flushes
With her young blood's translucent blushes,
Nestling in tresses warm as fur.

The contour of her cheek and chin
Is curved in one delicious line,
Pure as a vase of porcelain thin
Through which a tender light may shine ;
Her brow and blue-veined temple gleaming
Beneath the dusk of hair back-streaming
Are as a virgin's marble shrine.

The ear is burning crimson fire,
The flush is brightening on the face,
The lips are parting to suspire,
The hair grows restless in its place
As if itself new tangles wreathing ;
The bosom with her deeper breathing
Swells and subsides with ravishing grace.

The hand slides softly to caress,
Unconscious, that fine-pencilled curve
“Her lip’s contour and downiness,”
Unbending with a sweet reserve ;
A tender darkness that abashes
Steals out beneath the long dark lashes,
Whose sightless eyes make eyesight swerve.

The hand on chin and throat downslips,
Then softly, softly on her breast ;
A dream comes fluttering o’er the lips,
And stirs the eyelids in their rest,
And makes their undershadows quiver,
And like a ripple on a river
Glides through her breathing manifest.

I feel an awe to read this dream
So clearly written in her smile ;
A pleasant not a passionate theme,
A little love, a little guile ;
I fear lest she should speak revealing
The secret of some maiden feeling
I have no right to hear the while.

The dream has passed without a word
Of all that hovered finely traced ;

The hand has slipt down, gently stirrèd
To join the other at her waist ;
Her breath from that light agitation
Has settled to its slow pulsation ;
She is by deep sleep re-embraced.

Deep sleep, so holy in its calm,
So helpless, yet so awful too ;
Whose silence sheds as sweet a balm
As ever sweetest voice could do ;
Whose trancèd eyes, unseen, unseeing,
Shadowed by pure love, thrill our being
With tender yearnings through and through.

Sweet sleep ; no hope, no fear, no strife ;
The solemn sanctity of death,
With all the loveliest bloom of life ;
Eternal peace in mortal breath :
Pure sleep from which she will awaken
Refreshed as one who hath partaken
New strength, new hope, new love, new faith.

January, 1882.



MODERN PENELOPE.

(RIDDLE SOLVED.)



WHAT did she mean by that crochet work ?

The work that never got done,
Lolling as indolent as a Turk,

Looking demure as a Nun :
What subtle mystery might lurk
(Of course there must be one)

In that Penelope web of work,
The work that never got done ?

She lolled on the low couch just under the light
So very serene and staid :

We had some other guests that night,
One sang, another played,
A couple discovered the stars were bright,
Of course a youth and a maid,
I watched her knitting under the light
So very serene and staid.

I knew that she was a rogue in her heart,
As roguish as ever could be,

And she knew that I knew, yet would not dart
A single glance at me,
But seemed as it were withdrawn apart
Amid the companie,
A nun in her face, with a rogue in her heart
As roguish as ever could be.

I like a riddle when its knot
Involves a pretty girl,
I puzzle about, now cold, now hot,
Through every loop and twirl,
For the question is "Who" as well as "What"?
And the answer is thus a pearl,
And really you cannot study the knot,
Unless you study the girl.

With a graceful lazy kittypuss air
She fingered the net and the ball :
At first she started to work on the square,
And then she undid all :
To make it round was next her care,
But the progress was strangely small,
With a graceful lazy kittypuss air
Trifling with net and ball.

About her lips a quiet smile
Came hovering, then took rest :

A butterfly in the selfsame style
Will choose some sweet flower's breast :
Her eyes were drooping all the while,
But the drooping lids expressed
The satisfaction of a smile
Like a butterfly at rest.

Her hands kept floating to and fro
Like a pair of soft white doves,
In gentle dalliance coy and slow
Around a nest of Loves :
And against my chair her couch was low,
And six was the size of her gloves,
They were charming those hands there to and fro
Like a pair of soft white doves.

Her fair face opened like a flower,
And a sigh thrilled the smile on her lips,
And her eyes shone out with a dazzling power
From the dream of their half-eclipse
As she welcomed the trill of "A summer shower"
With plausible finger-tips—
Oh ! her eyes so bright, and her face like a flower,
And the exquisite smile of her lips !

Those hands kept floating soft and white
Our hearts to mesmerise,

Those dark eyes keep half-veiled their light
To lure and lure our eyes ;
That web is but a subtle sleight
To mesh us by surprise :
Do I not read your riddle right,
Penelope the wise ?

O you nun in face with the rogue in your heart
As roguish as ever can be,
You have played an immensely wiser part
Than the old Penelope :
You have caught twin loves in the toils of your art,
And neither will ever get free :
You have won the game of a heart for a heart,
And when shall the settling be ?



AT BELVOIR:

St

A BALLAD,

("*In mai*

My thought
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The other two beyond our ken
Most shamefully deserted,
And far from all the ways of men
Their stealthy steps averted :
Of course our Jack would go astray,
Erotic and erratic ;
But Mary !—well, I own the day
Was really too ecstatic.

We roamed with many a merry jest
And many a ringing laughter ;
The slow calm hours too rich in zest
To heed before and after :
Yet lingering down the lovely walks
Soft strains anon came stealing,
A finer music through our talks
Of sweeter, deeper feeling :

Yes, now and then a quiet word
Of seriousness dissembling
In smiles would touch some hidden chord
And set it all a-trembling :
I trembled too, and felt it strange ;—
Could I be in possession
Of music richer in its range
Than yet had found expression ?

The cattle standing in the mere,
The swans upon it gliding,
The sunlight on the waters clear,
The radiant clouds dividing ;
The solemn sapphire sky above,
The foliage lightly waving,
The soft air's Sabbath peace and love
To satisfy all craving.

We mapped the whole fair region out
As Country of the Tender,
From first pursuit in fear and doubt
To final glad surrender :
Each knoll and arbour got its name,
Each vista, covert, dingle ;—
No young pair now may track the same
And long continue single !

And in the spot most thrilling-sweet
Of all this Love-Realm rosy
Our truant pair had found retreat,
Unblushing, calm and cosy :
Where seats too wide for one are placed,
And yet for two but narrow,
It's "Let my arm steal round your waist,
And be my winsome marrow !"

Reclining on a pleasant lea
Such tender scenes rehearsing,
A freakish fit seized him and me
For wildly foolish versing :
We versed of this, we versed of that,
A pair of mocking sinners,
While our lost couple strayed or sat
Oblivious of their dinners.

But what was strange, our maddest rhymes
In all their divagations
Were charged and over-charged at times
With deep vaticinations :
I yearn with wonder at the power
Of Poetry prophetic
Which in my soul made that blithe hour
With this hour sympathetic.

For though we are in winter now,
My heart is in full summer :
Old Year, old Wish, have made their bow ;
I welcome each new-comer.
“ The King is dead, long live the King !
The throne is vacant never ! ”
Is true, I read, of everything,
So of my heart for ever !

My thoughts go on to next July,
More happy thoughts, more tender ;
“ The bridal of the earth and sky,”
A day of perfect splendour ;
A day to make the saddest heart
In bliss a firm believer ;
When two True Loves may roam apart
The shadiest walks of Belvoir.

There may be less of merry jest
And less of ringing laughter,
Yet life be much more rich in zest
And richer still thereafter ;
The love-scenes of that region fair
Have very real rehearsing,
And tremulous kisses thrill the air
Far sweetlier than sweet versing ;

The bud full blown at length reveal
Its deepest golden burning ;
The heart inspired with love unseal
Its inmost passionate yearning :
The music of the hidden chord
At length find full expression ;
The Seraph of the Flaming Sword
Assume divine possession.

January, 1882.

A STRANGER.



I.

It is not surely, this, a little thing,
That day and night and every Sabbath day
Throughout these months of winterless glad Spring,
March mild as April, April sweet as May,
And May as rich as June in common years,
It has been given me upon my way,
Given to me and all my village peers,
But most to me as my full heart knows well,
Brimming my eyes with tender wistful tears
And throbbing with strange awe ineffable,
To meet and pass, to follow with slow pace,
Or on the street or in our quiet dell
Or through the fields, that Lady of all grace
With sweet sad eyes and noble mournful face.

II.

We know not who she is or whence she came,
She and her little boy with her own eyes
And brow and patient smile, whose Christian name

Without the surname tells us where he lies

With her heart buried in the selfsame grave :
The larks were singing in the soft blue skies,

And even some few violets were brave

To breathe faint sweetness on the bland warm air,
Good Valentine such benediction gave,

When she arrived with him, her anxious care,

Her only joy, her terrible dark grief :
In early April he was lying there ;

The Spring all blithe with bud and flower and leaf
And scent and song above his Spring so brief.

III.

Only the Christian name upon the stone

Above the date of birth and date of death ;
Two syllables of everlasting moan,

Immortal sorrow breathing mortal breath,

Continual weeping that would fain not weep,
Sad comforting that vainly comforteth

The deadly anguish graven far more deep

Upon the heart than on the marble cold
“ For so He giveth His belovèd sleep.”

Yet with a lofty patience she controlled
The outward signs of anguish ; eve and morn
Tending that little bed of sacred mould

And others near it that were left forlorn ;
Praying, I think, to sleep herself outworn.

IV.

Her sorrow flowed with blessings from above ;
Her heart of joy and hope was in that tomb,
But not her heart of sympathy and love :

While her young flower was fading from its bloom
She had been wonderfully sweet and kind ;
And now that it was buried in the gloom

Her own sore suffering did but closelier bind
Her heart to other hearts in all distress ;
The little angel in her sad soul shrined

Was a true angel of pure gentleness
And soft compassion and unwearying will
To soothe and aid and with all solace bless :

Our joys and sorrows take our nature still ;
Hers wrought bright good from her own darkest ill.

V.

Tenderness, worship, bliss in yearning pain !—

To see her young and fair and more than fair,
Amidst us yet not of us, sole remain

As sanctified already unaware ;

To see the peacefulness of pure white brow
Beneath the smoothness of the rich brown hair ;

The cloistral solitude without the vow ;

The self-renunciation mild and meek
With meekness that is ever glad to bow,

Evading honours such as others seek,

Yet in its stooping cannot help but rise ;
To hear that soft slow voice its good words speak ;

To feel the fascination of those eyes,

Solemn and dark and deep as midnight skies.

VI.

I did not wonder she could be so pure

Amidst our petty cares and sordid strife,
But how our common meanness could endure

Beneath the lofty radiance of her life ;
 Until I saw how, fine and soft and clear
As starbeams quivering through the darkness rife,

Her effluence shone on souls all dull and drear :
 Then as the Moon in moving through the Night
Bears round her ever her own hemisphere

Of tranquil beauty and entrancing light
 By solemn shadows more mysterious made,
Her regnant beauty turned all darkness bright

Or glorified mysteriously its shade ;
Fair Queen most queenly as in Night arrayed.

VII.

Oh, joyless joy of this most bounteous June,
 For with the Maytide She is gone, is gone !
All men adore and love the one sole Moon ;

But she of all on whom her light has shone,
 Of all her pure and gracious light has blest,
Discerns no mortal save Endymion,

To him alone unveils her virgin breast,
 On him alone outpours her love divine.
What shall we do who undistinguished rest ?

Shall we against her solemn choice repine?

Or shall we rather lift our souls above
To hold her ever in a crystal shrine,

The perfect beauty of Heaven's brooding Dove,
The sacred vision of Heaven's reachless Love?

March, 1882.



LAW v. GOSPEL.¹



THE Gospel and the Law of late
Have been at sad dissension
Before the Judge and Magistrate :
Old Satan's last invention.
Of course the Law upholds the Law,
The Gospel over-ruling ;
And those who have St. Paul in awe
Must seek more modern schooling.

The Gospel says, Swear not at all ;
The Law, or good or bad law,
Says, You must swear, whate'er befall,
Or else I fine you, Bradlaugh.
Whereon he goes and swears himself
In solemn legal banter ;
His fellow-members on the shelf
Deposit him instanter.

¹ This and the two pieces following are reprinted from the *Weekly Dispatch*. "Despotism Tempered by Dynamite" was the last poem written by the author.

And then we have that narrow sect
Of most Peculiar People,
Who by the Book their way direct,
And not by the Church steeple.
They read how Asa sought not God,
But doctors, being sickly ;
And therefore slept beneath the sod
With his forefathers quickly.

St. James enjoins, When one is ill,
Send for an elder straightway ;
Anoint and pray (no doctor's bill !)
And thus elude Death's gateway.
So said so done ; and then report
Of death of son or daughter,
And parents sentenced by the Court
To prison for manslaughter.

And now a new and noisy set—
The Army of Salvation—
Our equal-minded justice fret
With constant botheration :
For sometimes they obstruct the way,
And sometimes cause a riot ;
Too much of zeal—too much, we say,
Why can't the fools keep quiet ?

The dean and canons in their stalls
Are placid as stalled cattle,
And never rush out from St. Paul's
To give the devil battle.
In streets and lanes to brawl and fight
Is far too low and rowdy ;
No, if he wants a spar, invite
Him home to Mrs. Proudie.

On Tuesday, March, the fourteenth day,
Before Sir Thomas Owden,
A youth was brought who blocked the way,
Already over-crowden—
Threadneedle-street—the wild *War Cry*,
This well-dressed youth was selling :
A camel and a needle's eye—
The rest requires no telling.

Sir Thomas said he understood
How men in shabby raiment,
To get a living, bad or good,
Should do this thing for payment ;
But he could never understand
How any young man, dressed all
In decent clothes, could join the band,
Like this young Henry Restall.

“It’s not to get a living, sir,”
This youth spoke fast and faster ;
“I have been called to minister—
I work for God, my Master.”
Sir Thomas answered (much I grieve
If you don’t find it *bon sens*),
He never could be made believe
In such outrageous nonsense.

This hardened youth he made reply,
“We have reformed some thousand
Poor drunkards ;” Sir T. winked full sly,
And sneezing sneered, “*Der Tausend !*”
And for a fortnight did remand,
Upon his good behaviour,
That youth, who now should understand
He mustn’t cry his Saviour.

Just think of Simon Peter thus,
And all the zealous dozen,
Brought up before Asinius,
Our Owden’s great fore-cousin.
He would have quickly stopped their prate
On a police-court summons ;
We should have no Archbishop Tait,
No pious House of Commons !

'Tis true they were but fishermen
And suchlike, poor and humble ;
And thus might earn a living then
Approved by every Bumble.
But preach a Gospel *not* for pelf !
Absurd to Owden thinkers !—
Just keep your Good News to yourself,
And cease reforming drinkers !

March, 1882.



THE OLD STORY AND THE NEW STOREY.

—o—

(HOUSE OF COMMONS, *Thursday March 23.*)

“For whosoever hath, to him shall be given, and he shall have more abundance : but whosoever hath not, from him shall be taken away even that he hath.”—MATTHEW xiii. 12.

THE Old Story says : We’ve another
Young prince who will wed like a man ;
Let us give him, because of his mother,
An extra ten thousand per ann.
She has barely enough for herself, sirs ;
Not five hundred a week is his sum ;
Some of you have vastly more pelf, sirs ;
Let our vote be unanimous, come !

The New Storey¹ says—(It is mentioned
How, hating such meanness to hear,
The noble array of the pensioned
Assailed him with laughter and jeer)—

¹ Mr. Storey, M.P. for Sunderland.

He says : Public money should solely
For good public service be spent.
(Dear lords, what a doctrine unholy !
Why it saps at your rights to your rent !)

He says : What I urge 'gainst a wasteful
And unjust proposal like this
Must to many of you be distasteful,
And the wherefore too palpable is ;
Since one hundred and ten of your body,
And one hundred and twenty-six peers,
For no service, or service of shoddy
Keep bleeding us numberless years.

He says : This ten thousand per annum
You would lavish on one wealthy pair—
Many hundred a grandad and grannam
Would keep in a comfort too rare ;
Or in Sunderland—that's my own borough—
A small place—laugh on !—would secure
Education quite free and quite thorough
Without any rate on the poor.

He says : These same princes as dummies
In army and navy fill posts,
While veterans, scorched up like mummies,
Must starve in the cold like their ghosts.

He says : Sweep away lordly flunkeys,
If you really this money must clutch,
Those bedizened and posturing monkeys—
Your Gold Sticks in Waiting and such.

He says—But fine ears we won't batter
With more of his speech unpolite ;
So we'll give our own view of the matter,
And *our* view of course is the right.
We say : When your State-ship you're building,
If you *will* have a gilt figure-head,
Of course you must pay for the gilding ;
We say—there's no more to be said.

It is true that the head a ship carries
In proportion costs little when built ;
It is true that this head never marries
And breeds little heads to be gilt.
It is true—but sane words are a treasure
Too precious for subjects like these—
Having set up such heads at your pleasure,
You can set them aside when you please.

April, 1882.

DESPOTISM TEMPERED BY DYNAMITE.



THERE is no other title in the world
So proud as mine, who am no law-cramped king,
No mere imperial monarch absolute,
The WHITE TSAR worshipped as a visible God,
As Lord of Heaven no less that Lord of Earth—
I look with terror to my crowning day.

Through half of Europe my dominions spread,
And then through half of Asia to the shores
Of Earth's great ocean washing the New World ;
And nothing bounds them to the Northern Pole,
They merge into the everlasting ice—
I look with terror to my crowning day.

Full eighty million subjects worship me—
Their father, high priest, monarch, God on earth ;

My children who but hold their lives with mine
For our most Holy Russia dear and great,
Whose might is concentrated in my hands—
I look with terror to my crowning day.

I chain and gag with chains and gags of iron
The impious hands and mouths that dare express
A word against my sacred sovranty ;
The half of Asia is my prison-house,
Myriads of convicts lost in its Immense—
I look with terror to my crowning day.

I cannot chain and gag the evil thoughts
Of men and women poisoned by the West,
Frenzied in soul by the anarchic West ;
These thoughts transmute themselves to dynamite ;
My sire was borne all shattered to his tomb—
I look with terror to my crowning day.

My peasants rise to their unvarying toil,
And go to sleep outwearied by their toil,
Without the hope of any better life.
But with no hope they have no deadly fear,
They sleep and eat their scanty food in peace—
I look with terror to my crowning day.

My palaces are prisons to myself ;
I taste no food that may not poison me ;
I plant no footstep sure it will not stir
Instant destruction of explosive fire ;
I look with terror to each day and night—
 With tenfold terror to my crowning day.

May, 1882.



THE DOOM OF A CITY.

A FANTASIA.

—o—

PART I.

—

THE CITY.

I.

THE sky was spacious warm and bright,
The clouds were pure as morning snow ;
In myriad points of living light
The sea lay laughing to and fro.
Above the hills a depth of sky,
Dim-pale with heat and light intense,
Was overhung by clouds piled high
In mountain-ranges huge and dense ;
Whose rifts and ridges ran aloft
Far to their crests of dazzling snow,
Whence spread a vaporous lustre soft
Veiling the noontide's azure glow.

Through mists of purple glory seen
Those dim and panting hill-waves lay,
Absorbed into the heavens serene,
Dissolving in the perfect day.

But when the sun burned high and bare
In his own realm of solemn blue,
The clouds hung isolated there,
Dark purple grandeurs vast and few ;
Like massive sculptures wrought at large
Upon that dome's immensity,
Like constant isles whose foamlit marge
Rose high from out that sapphire sea.

And all the day my boat sped on
With rapid gliding smooth as rest,
As if by mystic dreamings drawn
To some fair haven in the West ;
Flew onward swift without a gale
As if it were a living thing,
And spread with joy its snow-white sail
As spreads a bird its snow-white wing ;
Flashed on along the lucid deep
Dividing that most perfect sphere,
A vault above it glowing steep,
A vault beneath it no less clear ;

Within whose burning sapphire-round
The clouds the air the land the sea
Lay thrilled with quivering glory, drowned
In calm as of Eternity.

II.

Anear the dying of that royal day
Those amber-vested hills began to swerve ;
And soon a lofty Pharos, gleaming white
Upon its isle set darkly in the light,
Beckoned us onward to the spacious bay
Encompassed broadly by their noble curve.
And so at length we entered it ; and faced
The thin dark lines of countless masts, all traced
Upon the saddest sunset ever seen—
Spread out like an interminable waste
Of red and saffron sand, devoured by slow
Persistent fire ; beneath whose desolate glow
A City lay, thick-zoned with solemn green
Of foliage massed upon the steeps around.
Between those mast-lines flamed the crystal fires
Of multitudinous windows ; and on high
Grand marble palaces and temples, crowned
With golden domes and radiant towers and spires,
Stood all entranced beneath that desert sky,
Based on an awful stillness. Dead or dumb

That mighty City through the breathless air
Thrilled forth no pulse of sound, no faintest hum
Of congregated life in street and square :
Becalmed beyond all calm those galleons lay,
As still and lifeless as their shadows there,
Fixed in the magic mirror of the bay
As in a rose-flushed crystal weirdly fair.
- A strange, sad dream : and like a fiery pall,
Blazoned with death, that sky hung over all.

III.

Where, eastward from the town, the shore was
low,
I drew at length my shallop up the sand,—
The quiet and gloomless twilight gathering slow ;
And took my way across the lonely strand,
And onward to the City, lost in thought.
Who shall his own wild life-course understand ?
From terror through great terrors I am brought
To front my fate in this mysterious land.
In my old common world, well fenced about
With myriad lives that fellowed well my own,
Terror and deadly anguish found me out
And drove me forth to seek the dread Unknown ;
Through all whose terrors I have yet been brought,
Though hopeless, helpless, utterly alone.

May yet my long wild night be blessed with morn ?
Some revelation from the awful Throne
Awaits me surely : if my life, torn free
From dire Egyptian bondage, has been led
In safety through the all-devouring sea ;
If, lost in foodless deserts, it was fed
Though murmuring ever ; hath it truly trod
Such paths for nothing ? Shall it not be brought
To stand awe-stricken 'neath some Mount of God
Wrapt in thick clouds of thunder fire and gloom,
And hear the Law of Heaven by which its doom
To good or evil must be henceforth wrought ?

• IV. •

The moon hung golden large and round,
Soothing its beauty up the quiet sky
In swanlike slow pulsations, while I wound
Through dewy meads and gardens of rich flowers,
Whose fragrance like a subtle harmony
Was fascination to the languid hours.
A tender mist of light was interfused
Upon the hills and waters, woods and leas,
Throughout the gloomless gloaming ; and I mused
Dim thoughts deep-floating in delicious dream,
Until the long stern lines of cypress trees,
Amidst whose plumes funereal there did seem

To creep with quivering sobs a moaning breath,
Awed back my heart to life—to life and death.
Far in the mystic moonlight lay outspread,
In trance of solemn beauty still and weird,
That Camp and City of the ancient dead ;
And far around stood up in dense array
Those monumental marbles ever reared
By men still battling with the powers of Life
To those released before them from its sway :
Victors or vanquished in the fearful strife,
What matters ?—ah, within our Mother's breast,
From toil and tumult, sin and sorrow free,
Sphered beyond hope and dread, divinely calm,
They lie, all gathered into perfect rest ;
And o'er the trance of their Eternity
The Cypress waves more holy than the palm.

V.

A funeral train was gathered round a bier :
The reverend priest with lifted hands and face,
Appealing silently to Heaven's grace
For this young soul called early from our sphere ;
And white-robed maidens pale, whose hands scarce held
What further symbol flowers they had to shed
Upon their sweet lost sister,—awe and dread
Numbing their noisier grief, they stood compelled

To meet Death's eyes which wither youth from Life ;
And leaning sole against a tree apart,
As one might lean just stricken to the heart,
A youth, wrought calm by woe's self-slaying strife—
His head was sunken nerveless on his breast,
He stood a dumb blind statue of Despair.
While all yet moved not, I approached them there,
Murmuring : They bring this maiden to her rest
Beneath the pure sad moon, in thoughtful night,
Rather than in the garish day whose King
Rides through the Heavens for ever triumphing
Throned above ruth in never-darkened light ;
That ere the blank dawn chills them they may gaze,
And see her soul as some white cloud on high
Floating serenely up the star-strewn sky. . . .
My steps were now close near them, when amaze
Convulsed me with a swooning suddenness—
What people dwell within this Silent Land,
Who thus have placed, through day and night to stand,
This Scene complete in all its images
Of Life in solemn conference with Death,
Amidst the wide and populous solitude
Of Death's own realm?—a people of strange mood.
For all,—the maidens meek with bated breath
And eyes weighed down by awe and fear and sorrow,
The priest appealing to the Heavens above,

The youth whose mortal night could hope no morrow,
The sweet young girl new riven from his love,—
All save the flowers, the withered flowers alone,
Were carven weirdly in unconscious stone.

VI.

Beneath my gaze was spread the princely mart.
From out the folded hills came broad the stream
Whose pulse flowed life-full through the City's heart—
The City dead in ever-voiceless dream.
From all her stately mansions, reared apart
'Midst lawns and gardens, came no lamplight gleam,
No cheerful glow and smoke of household fire ;
No festal music dying through the night,
Sad in its death as joyous in its birth ;
No serenades intoning soft desire,
To which young hearts in secret throb delight ;
No noise of banded revellers issuing forth
 With shouts and songs and jars,
Who find the pale moon reeling jollily
And twinkling laughters in the high cold stars.
 Between the hills and sea
 Only a dark dead dearth
Of soulless silence yawned in dreadful mystery.

VII.

My limbs were shuddering while my veins ran fire,
And hounded on by dread
No less than by desire,
I plunged into the City of the Dead,
And pierced its Mausolean loneliness—
Between the self-sufficing palaces,
Broad fronts of azure, fire and gold, which shone
Spectrally pallid in the moonlight wan ;
Adown great streets ; through spacious sylvan squares,
Whose fountains plashing lone
Fretted the silence with perpetual moan ;
Past range on range of marts which spread their wares
Weirdly unlighted to the eyes of heaven,
Jewels and silks and golden ornaments,
Rich perfumes soul-in-soul of all rare scents,
Viols and timbrels,—O wild mockery !
Where are the living shrines for these adornings ?
Shall love-tormented phantoms hither hie,
Resolved that the tomb be no more mute,
And thrill their heart-sick plaints from lyre and lute
To plead against fair phantoms' cruel scornings ;
Wakening dim ghosts of buried melodies
To shiver out beneath the scornful skies,
And wander homeless till they fail of breath
About this desert realm of timeless death ?

VIII.

What saw I in the City, which could make
All thought a frenzy and all feeling madness?
What found I in the City for whose sake
Blank death were welcome as a restful gladness?
I hold it truth, that what the stars and moon
Can gaze upon with clear and steadfast eyes,
Still soaring as of old to reach their noon,
Serenely regnant in unwithered skies;
That scene should never fill a human being
With hopelessness of horror in the seeing.
Can souls be blighted where the mere trees grow?
Can lives be frozen where the dead streams flow?
Can Man be prostrate where the fleeting mountains
Stand up and fling abroad their joyous fountains?
Could oceans, hills, stars, heavens, those imageries
And shadows of our sole realities,
Endure but for a moment undestroyed
Were we extinct—Eternity left void?
O truth beyond our sin and death's concealing!—
The ghastliest den, worst Hell of pain and fear,
In which a spirit can have will, thought, feeling,
Is to that spirit no unnatural sphere;
Nor justifies that spirit for the death
Of firm self-trust, of love and hope and faith.

IX.

What found I in the City, then, which turned
My deep and solemn hope to wild despair?
What mystery of horror lay inurned
Within the royal City great and fair?
What found I?—Dead stone sentries stony-eyed,
Erect, steel-sworded, brass-defended all,
Guarding the sombrous gateway deep and wide
Hewn like a cavern through the mighty wall;
Stone statues all throughout the streets and squares,
Grouped as in social converse or alone;
Dim stony merchants holding forth rich wares
To catch the choice of purchasers of stone;
Fair statues leaning over balconies,
Whose bosoms made the bronze and marble chill;
Statues about the lawns, beneath the trees;
Firm sculptured horsemen on stone horses still;
Statues fixed gazing on the flowing river
Over the bridge's sculptured parapet;
Statues in boats, amidst its sway and quiver
Immovable as if in ice-waves set:—
The whole vast sea of life about me lay,
The passionate, heaving, restless, sounding life,
With all its tides and billows, foam and spray,
Arrested in full tumult of its strife
Frozen into a nightmare's ghastly death,

Struck silent from its laughter and its moan ;
The vigorous heart and brain and blood and breath
Stark, strangled, confined in eternal stone.

X.

Look away there to the right—How the bay lies broad
and bright,
All athrob with murmurous rapture in the glory of the
moon !
See in front the palace stand, halls and columns nobly
planned ;
Marble home for marble dwellers is it not full fair and
boon ?
See the myriads gathered there in that green and wooded
square,
In mysterious congregation,—they are statues every
one :
All are clothed in rich array ; it is some high festal day ;
The solemnity is perfect with that pallid moon for sun.
See the theatre ranged high to its dome of deep blue sky ;
Tier on tier of serried statues glare impassioned on its
stage,
On its background of deep night, on its sculptured Chorus
white,
On its lofty sculptured actors locked in deadly tragic
rage :

Perhaps the drama was *too* great,—Titans, Furies, eyeless
Fate

Brooded in such sulphurous darkness thunder-swollen
o'er its doom,

That the multitude abide overwrought and petrified,
Waiting till satyric sun-bursts rend away the crushing
gloom.

Turn, and o'er the river mark that huge structure scowling
dark :

It is black stone seamed with crimson, hopeless death
with cruel gore :

In it stony jailers guard stony prisoners evil-starred ;
Dungeoned thus within their dungeon, they are calm
and groan no more.

Note the temples every one—How the great gods are un-
done !

Not a steer or goat or doveling for their holy hunger
dies :

Cold, long quenched their sacred fires ; dull, long dumb
their flattering quires ;

All the very priesthood staring at rich gifts with stolid
eyes !

Not a maid whose yielding charms can enrich a god's
bold arms ;

Yet perchance they dwell contented though thus shorn
of wealth and state :

Nectar-and-ambrosia-blest, they may bask in perfect rest,
Since (with marble joints and larynx) Man rests unim-
portunate !

Ha ! search eagerly around—every vault beneath the
ground,

Every mansion, every chariot, every galley, everywhere ;
And for ever, ever find all this blissful human kind

Lifted up from clay's corruption into marble firm and
fair :

Fear and shame and anguish stilled, every evil passion
killed,

Crooked forms and ugly faces grown transcendent
works of art ;

While the grand or lovely mood of the fair and young
and good

Is beatified in beauty that can nevermore depart. . . .
And the full moon gazeth down on the smokeless lamp-
less town,

In a solemn trance of triumph, with her choir of radiant
stars ;

For their peace is vexed no more by a curse-and-shriek-
swelled roar,

By ferocities, obscenities, inebriate brawls and jars :
Nay, the very grass and trees, and the disencumbered
breeze,

And the stainless river-waters, and the broad bright
glittering bay,—

Do they all joy that the strife of our sordid restless life
Is now locked in adamantine bonds of perfect peace
for aye ?

Ever-loved and gracious Earth, Mystic Mother of our
birth,

This is cruel, bitter, terrible, this joy in our dead rest !
Canst Thou still leap forth and run, glory-speeded round
the Sun,

O Thou Niobe of World-stars, with Thy fairest and Thy
best—

With Thy vigorous youthful darling lying stone-cold on
Thy breast !

XI.

The Palace gates stand open wide and free ;
The King and Queen and all their company,
Transfigured in full splendour of their pride,
Came flowing forth in one refulgent tide,
While trumpets rang their silver-throated blare
Of jubilation through the sunny air ;
Swept onward slowly 'neath the azure skies
Between the myriads of adoring eyes,
And poured into the Theatre's dense sea
Of many-billowed life triumphantly ;
As some grand river in the sunset shine
May pour its boon of gold and crimson wine,

Brimming the fulness of the purpled ocean
Which heaves and sparkles, murmuring proud emotion.
Gathered together, all awaited there
Such scenic storms as purify life's air ;
Whose scathless lightnings shimmer wildly grand,
Whose lofty thunders soothe sure peace more bland ;
And now, without a throb, without a breath,
They wait, all frozen into icy death.

XII.

O marble Monarch, far more awful now
Than when thy crown begirt a throbbing brow !
No tyrant ever lived so dire and dread
As He who sways the sceptre in thy stead ;
Never before on earth did any state
Beneath oppression cower thus desolate,
Thus utterly resigned to crushing Fate !
SILENCE broods ghastly on the dead realm's throne :
Whatever life, in prayer, or sigh, or moan,
Would shake the Nightmare of his tyranny,
Shudders with anguish, horror, lunacy,
To feel its scorned and strangled pleadings creep
Like homeless spectres through the vacant deep,
And wither into nothingness at last—
Devoid of refuge, unrelieved, aghast.

XIII.

The Palace gates indeed stand open wide :
Perchance the stately sepulchre may hide
Some single life amidst the desolation,
Preserved alone in mystical salvation,
Entranced apart in holy contemplation ?
Pace up the steps, tread through the hall,—and see
In scattered groups all lounging listlessly
Those armoured gallants of the Royal Guard—
Poor fellows ! they have found it sadly hard
To make their stately moments speed along,
Though spurred with wine and gaming, jest and song,
Cruelly mulcted of their sumptuous share
In the great festival proceeding there.

XIV.

Haste on, haste on ; awaken from their tomb
The ghostly echoes, swarming through the gloom,
Haunting your footsteps, gathering rank on rank,
Rustling demoniac through the deadly blank ;
Better, far better that the air be rife
With weird deliriums of demoniac life,
Than void with utter idiotic death.
Haste on, with burning blood and breathless breath;—

How clear are all things round the rapid flight !
Shrouded in gloom or washed with pale moonlight,
The chemistry of terror thus intense
Burns them all lurid on the shrinking sense.—
See the mild maiden letting loose her soul
In tears and blushes o'er the tender scroll
Which plains his anguish since they two were parted,
And raves that she, poor thing, is stony-hearted.
Hurry from room to room, from hall to hall ;
And mark the effigies on every wall—
Warriors and minstrels, nobles, Kings, and priests,
Adoring, conquering, feasting royal feasts ;
Olympian forms, ladies divinely fair
With lily-sceptred hands and flower-crowned hair ;
See each and all ev'n as you hurry past
Burst into sudden life, and swarming fast
Join in the tingling chase through death and night,
While clamorous echoes voice their mad delight.

XV.

Most sweet young Mother ! thou hadst ample pleasure
Left quiet alone here with thine infant treasure ;
Which, poised unsurely on its feeble limbs,
Across the sea-strange marble toward thee swims,—
One foot half-lifted, while the arms outplead
For thine extended arms to help its need :

It stands, thou kneelest ; never on thy breast
Shall it fall forward in triumphant rest.

XVI.

Far in his lofty turret whence the bay
And half of Heaven's vault were seen alway ;
The bay, the distant ocean, and with these
Broad scope of temples streets and palaces,
The theatre, the square ; the moving throngs,
Whose converse-murmurs flashing into songs
And laughters winged with joy were wont to rise
And wander birdlike through the sun-tranced skies,
Rippling deliciously the languid air ;
Alone, yet not alone, the Sage dwelt there.
Doubtless his individual life required
In seeming solitude to be inspired
By constant intercourse with general life,
And with the universal Spirit rife
In Man and Nature,—One in all their forms,
Alike contented with its worlds and worms,
Through all its countless masks alike resplendent,
The Breath of Life, eternal and transcendent.

XVII.

He sits, the full-length statue of a Sage,
Amid the busts of those of every age

Who handed on the torch of Wisdom, bright
With growing splendour, 'thwart the billowy night
Of shoreless Ignorance. Before him lies
The roll which telleth on what mysteries
He shed its lustre till they shone out clear :
I trace its periods by the moonlight here.
It is with swelling reverence dedicate,
“Unto the King magnificent and great ;
The bounteous Sun by whom we live and move
And flourish ever : Who commands our love
Even more thoroughly than our perfect awe ;
Swaying His burning Throne by Heavenly law,
While lifted far—by nature as by birth—
Above the petty statutes of our earth :
Who while His warmth createth and sustaineth
Rich life in all, lights all ; and no less deigneth
To feed abundantly with life and light
What humble spheres may strive to temper night
In realms left dark while His imperial sway
Vouchsafeth happier realms their boon of day :
To Him, by Whom our heritage is grown
The flower o' the World ; to Him whose godlike throne
Shall ever stand beside its subject sea,
Fulgent with valour, arts and equity,
Based on a princely people's love and bliss :
CHRYSANDROS, TYRANT OF COSMOPOLIS !”

XVIII.

Follow the problems which he hath resolved
Though heretofore in clouds of doubts involved :
“ Shall this fair World consume in course of time ?
Our Earth is young ? or old ? or in her prime ? ”
Whereto the Theses proud, less said than sung
In liberal phrases of his golden tongue :
“ This glorious Universe shall live for ever ;
By all decay and death diminished never,
Nor added to by constant birth and growth ;
But in the balanced interchange of both,
Ascending slowly by successive stages
Of nobler Good and Beauty through the Ages ;
Until its infinite Æther and the Whole
Of stars and spheres that through it flashing roll
Shall be informed with conscious Life and Soul :
The All, one perfect Sphere, breathing one breath
Of cosmic Life too pure for birth or death. . . .
Our Earth has scarcely ceased to be a child,
Sweet in its grace, but ignorant and wild :
She putteth on about these very years
The bloom of maidenhood, whose smiles and tears
Are all of Love : she openeth out her heart
In throbs of passionate rapture, to impart

The dearest secrets of her treasured beauty
To Man, her Lord ; constrained by yearning duty
Which he shall recompense with wiser love :
How blest are we all previous men above,
Born in this Spring of her millennial Youth !—
O gracious Truth, divine and tranquil Truth,
As I long years have worshipped only Thee,
Thou hast at length unveiled Thy face to me,
That I may ever of Thy priesthood be !”

XIX.

I trace not further in the tingling scroll
The steps by which he reached this glorious goal.
It is too horrible :—alone, alone,
I make mad dalliance with the empty flesh,
Whose form is whole, whose ghastly bloom is fresh ;
And by my side, that hater of the soul—
The grinning, the accursèd Skeleton !
It is too horrible—O dreadful God,
 Thou know'st—only Thou,
What dismal paths my shuddering feet have trod ;
Yet never knew I agony until now ;
Never,—O Thou who heardst me when I said
Coldly and quietly, with confirming heart,
“ I take thee, Misery, for my faithful Bride :
Despair hath smoothed the secret marriage-bed

Wherein we two, embracing close, may hide,
 And wreak our stern unwitnessed vow—
Never in life, nor after death, to part.
I love thee for the love which only Thou
 Dost bear me : Thy caresses
Sting my faint heart, Thy kisses on my brow
Are fire and numbing frost, Thy tingling tresses
Like serpents creep about me even now.
O my enamoured Darling, deadly sweet !
 Sorcery smitten Sorceress !
 Queen of lurid loveliness !
Most tender-hearted ministrant of Ill !
My life, my soul is lying at your feet ;
Possess me, use me, at your own wild will !”

XX.

O fool, fool, fool ! cherishing fatal madness !
Mad with self-consciousness of guilt and woe,
Mad with the folly of the world's much gladness
While it was no less sunk in guilt and woe ;
I shut myself up from the lives around me,
Eating my own foul heart—envenomed food ;
And while dark shadows more and more enwound me,
Nourished a dreary pride of solitude ;
The cords of sympathy which should have bound me
In sweet communion with earth's brotherhood,

I drew in tight and tighter still around me,
Strangling my best existence for a mood.
What—Solitude in midst of a great City,
In midst of crowded myriads brimmed with Life!—
When every tear of anguish or of pity,
When every shout of joy and scream of strife,
When every deed and word and glance and gesture,
Every emotion, impulse, secret thought
Pent in the soul from all material vesture,
Through all those myriads spread and interwrought ;
Inspiring each the air with its own spirit,
Rayed forth as light is from a fount intense ;
The universal Æther forced to bear it,
A certain though mysterious influence
Affecting duly every other creature
That breathed its breath of life ; for good or ill,
For pain or pleasure, acting on each nature,
Beyond the consciousness, despite the will.
Dire Vanity ! to think to break the union
That interweaveth strictly soul with soul
In constant, sane, life-nourishing communion :
The rivers ever to the ocean roll,
The ocean-waters feed the clouds on high
Whose rains descending feed the flowing rivers :
All the world's children must how quickly die
Were they not all receivers and all givers !

XXI.

But this is Solitude, O dreadful Lord !
My spirit starves in this abysmal air—
 Of every human word,
Of sigh and moan, of music and of prayer,
Of passionate heart-beats felt though never heard,
 So utterly stript bare :
The awful heavens are tranquil and divine,
Serene and saintly in their purple deep
 The moon and young stars shine ;
No living souls beneath their influence leap,
No other eyes are fixed on them with mine :
 Men said that Death and Sleep
Are brothers ;—yes, as lurid lightnings may.
Be kindred to the glory of calm day,
Or darkness of the restful night-tide boon
To darkness of the sun eclipsed at noon. . . .
The Soul is murdered ; and her world bereft
 By some dire doom still left,
A fadeless corpse whose perfect form is rife
“ With ghastly affectations of true life.”

XXII.

How long, how long, I cowered beside the Sage ;
Whose head was lifted, fronting full the skies

In tranquil triumph from his victory lone.
Beneath that broad brow rough with thought and age,
The pitiless light-beams glittered on his eyes,
Like fatal swords flashed keen against a stone
To sharpen them for piercing to the heart,—
How was his triumph smitten, pierct, and slain !

But cowering there apart,
Upon those swelling eyeballs, that stern head,
I ever gazed ; while in my burning brain

A cold thought soothing spread :
As one who drains a poison-chalice slowly,
In fixed and infinite longing to be dead ;
So let my yearning vision cleave amain
To this grand marble image melancholy,
Till I have drunken in to the last drain
That poisonous Spirit of Death which fills it wholly. . . .
The flesh that crept like worms is growing numb ;
The raging fire of blood is dying cold ;
The rout of fiendish thoughts are almost dumb :
The heavens fade like a Vision cycles-old,
Where from dead eyes gaze thoughts uncomprehended :
Thank God, I soon shall cease to be alone ;
My mad discordant life is nearly blended
With all this realm's unsuffering death of stone.

PART II.

THE JUDGMENTS.

I.

A multitudinous roaring of the ocean !
Voices of sudden and earthquaking thunder
 From the invisible mountains !
The heavens are broken up and rent asunder
 By curbless lightning-fountains,
Streaming and darting through that black commotion,
In which the moon and stars are swallowed with the sky.
Throughout the Mausolean City spread
Drear palpitations, long-drawn moan and sigh ;
And then—an overwhelming whirlwind blast ?
Or else, indeed, the irrepressible cry
Of all its statues waking up aghast !
Doth God in final Judgment come thus heralded ?

II.

I saw Titanic forms dark, solemn, slow,
Like thunderclouds imperious o'er the wind
Sweep far with haughty tramlings to and fro ;

I heard great voices peal and trumpets blow :
Strange fragments of their chanting shook my mind.

“If the owl haunts doleful ruins and lives in the sombre
night,

Could it joy in the cheerful homes of men, could it love
the noonday light ?

If the serpent couches in jungles and deserts of burning
sand,

Would it rather cast its slough in the peopled corn-rich
land ?

If the great bear prowls alone in desolate wastes of ice,
Could it joy to range in herded power through a tropic
Paradise ?

If the vulture gorges on carrion and all abhorrent things,
Would it rather slake with fruits and wine the rush of its
obscene wings ?

.

“We sought through the archives of Fate, through all the
records of Doom,

Records of noontide refulgence, records of lightning-seared
gloom :

And lo, we have never found while the highth and the
depth we explored,

We have never yet traced out Punishment or Reward.

.

“Peace may be happy and sweet ; bitter and heart-rend-
ing Strife ;

Sin is corruption and death, Virtue is health and life :

But every being is placed in that sphere, in that crisis,
that spot,

Which alone its own nature demands and asserts for its
lot :

As itself from itself its web the spider spins out,

Doth each all the net of relations which weave it about :

The sun shines the sun by the lustre he lavishes forth ;

For his might and his life and his light circles round him
the earth :

All the World—this infinite azure robe sphere-spangled
sublime,

In which God walks forth revealed and veiled to the
creatures of Space and Time,

Is all interwoven in one (each atom, each star, as each soul,
Evolving so duly the threads of its work for its part in
the Whole) :

With a woof and warp of might and light and mysteries
all is wrought,

For the many-figured many-hued being and passion and
thought.

.

“Here hath a spirit full bliss to breathe ever-bland golden
air ;

Here hath a spirit wild hurrying storms of doubt, dread,
anguish, despair :

For the world-realms are swept on their path for ever,
through day and night ;

And their course is advanced no less, no more, in the
gloom than in the light :

And the journey is infinite truly,—through every various
clime

Do the countless myriads wander on, through every season
of time ;

Cool water for him in the desert-blaze, red fire for him
in the frost,

Languor for him in the summer-peace, fierce heart for the
tempest-tost :

While all whence they know not whither they know not
wend ;

Who appraiseth the means and progress, who conceiveth
the end ?

But we swear by the Life Eternal, we swear by Eternal
Death,

We swear by the Fate supreme which rules in every pulse
and breath ;

That strong or weak, simple or wise, polluted or most holy
Each each day is fed with the food befitting him fully
and solely."

III.

Again deep peace, again the stars and moon :
I stood between the theatre and square,
Beholding as before the statues there
Unstirred and silent in the lethal swoon.

Lo ! in the empyréan grew a light—
A great and awful Splendour, through its shroud
Of fold on fold of massy thundercloud
Intensely burning down with steadfast might.

Wherefrom a Voice descended vast and lone ;
Of thunder-dreadfulness, of sea-fierce anger,
Yet in its lofty silver-volumed clangour
Chanting an unimpassioned monotone :

“WHEN ALL THE WINE IS POISONED IT MUST BE
DESTROYED UTTERLY ;
THE VESSELS ALSO WHICH CONTAINED IT MUST
BE BURNED AND GROUND TO DUST.”

Instantly shudderings shook the stony crowd ;
Some rigid arms with writhing spasms were lifted,
Some dungeon-throats with frenzy-spasms rifted
By hideous strangled voices shrieking loud :

Abominable Fate,
We hurl thee back thy hate !

The poison and the wine—
Our sins and souls are thine !
Ah ! pangs of utter death
Stifle our breath—

Hear us ; we plead ; hear us ; oh, wait !”

No answer came save trumpet-voices blaring
Death and destruction as in furious fray ;
And while those forms gasped out their cry despairing
They sank down crumbling into dusty spray.
Then, as the trumpet clamours died away,
Did crash on crash in clear succession sound,
Like lingering peals of thunder ; each the knell
Of house or column falling to the ground
In sudden ruin, as those statues fell.

And next, as if the solid hills were all
Disseated now to glide tremendously
Over the town and plunge athwart the sea,
A mass of gloom enveloped in its pall
Temple and palace, basement dome and spire ;
Then o’er the marble crowd submerging came :
Its black oppression burned throughout my frame,
A torture of intolerable fire.
Yet when at length its ponderous bulk was rolled
Over the shrinking waters out of sight,

The City and the steadfast statues white
Stood all unchanged about me ; but, behold,
The uttered condemnation had been wrought
Upon the ruined fragments,—they were naught.

IV.

That cloud-consuming fire still held the sky,
Blotting its worlds out wholly ; while the sphere
Seemed listening breathless in an awful fear,
Till that great Voice again rang forth on high :

“WHEN NOW THE SAPLESS TREE BEARS BLOOM NOR
FRUIT,

WHY LINGER TRUNK AND ROOT?

LET IT BE HEWN AWAY AND FIRE-DESTROYED ;
AND IN ITS PLACE LEFT VOID

A LIVING TREE BE SET TO SPREAD AND RISE,
RESPONSIVE TO THE BOUNTY OF THE SKIES.”

The sentence smote some statues like a sword ;
With nerveless gestures pitiful to see
They moaned their helpless hopeless litany,
“We lived, we lived, O great and dreadful Lord !”

Then as they crumbled into dust away,
The Answer speeded from the hills behind,—
A noise of rushing like a mighty wind :

The ashen fire-flood in a tempest grey
Hissed through the City and the wan array ;
And hurrying o'er the sea, as if its might
With grim joy hasted to fulfil such trust,
Swept all the human and palatial dust
To irretrievable Chaos, Death and Night.

And when that deadly storm of fire was past,
A Voice came roaring like its final blast :

“WHOSE VIRTUE CANNOT PAY THEIR LIFE'S EXPENSE,
WHOSE SOULS ARE LOST IN SENSE,
THEY ARE NO MORE ; THEMSELVES WITH GOD HAVE
WILLED,—
THEIR ÆON IS FULFILLED.”

V.

Once more that fire possessing sole the sky,
Once more deep silence o'er the lessened throng
Of waiting statues ; and it lasted long
Ere that great Voice again pealed forth on high :

“WHEN HE WHO HAD A PALACE AND ITS POWER,
WELL-FAVOURED FOR HIS DOWER,
HAS PROVED UNJUST AND PROUD, HAS SPENT ITS TREASURES
ON SELFISH POMPS AND PLEASURES ;

HE MUST DESCEND FROM HIS EXALTED PLACE :

YET, IF IN DEEP DISGRACE

HE DO NOT SINK STILL DEEPER, TILL HIS BREATH

BE WHOLLY QUENCHED IN DEATH ;

BUT LEARN TO BUILD AGAIN HIS KINGLY HEART,

THE THRONE AWAITS HIM AND THE KINGLY PART."

Ah ! what a multitude of statues then

Were shaken by the thunder of this doom !—

"O Lord ! all perish if Thou wilt consume
In justice ! Lord have mercy on frail men !"

Ev'n as the crash of smitten structures roared

The answering Judgment-terrors filled the sky :

Inexorably swift it streamed and poured

A red-fire deluge from that cloud on high,

Which drowned the City and the multitude,

Devouring all the space from hills to sea.

Hissing and roaring the resistless flood

Plunged through the trembling earth, in haste to flee

With its vast ravage ; and the earth gaped wide

To swallow in that cup of wrath amain,

Then gnashed her seared and riven jaws to hide

What shook her yet with shuddering throbs of pain.

How many had become the torrent's prey,

Swept down abrupt into some lower sphere !

But of the rest—can vision cheat me here ?

What forms are these amidst the wan array
Of human marble? Strange new stony forms—
These serpents, panthers, wolves, these apes and swine,
Vultures and hawks and owls, with sheep and kine,
And many others, brutes and birds and worms,
Couched in unutterably piteous rest,
The sorcery of that Judgment-fire attest.

VI.

No more wild agonies shook the steadfast Earth ;
That night of cloud, unable to sustain
Its soul of fire, was withering ; when again
Upon the silence that great Voice flowed forth :

“WHEN HE WHO SHOULD HAVE TRAVELLED ALL THE
DAY,
HAS LINGERED ON HIS WAY
TO SPORT WITH IDLERS ; OR IN COMMON FEAR
OF LONE PATHS STEEP AND DREAR,
HAS TURNED ASIDE TO PACE DOWN CROWDED ROADS
OF RICH AND GAY ABODES ;
HE MUST PLOD THIS DAY’S JOURNEY ON THE MORROW
WITH WEARY RUE AND SORROW,
ERE HE CAN WIN HIS HAPPY HOME, AND GREET
THE DEAR FRIENDS WAITING FOR HIS LAGGARD FEET.”

Whereunto statue-voices low implored :
“Free human fellowship is very sweet ;

Bitter with our own kind as foes to meet—
Heavy the load of uncompanioned life !
Alas, we are so weary-sick of strife !
Grant us awhile Thy perfect peace, O Lord !”

The humble plaining of that saddest prayer,
Relapsing into stony silentness,
So filled my heart that I was unaware
Until surrounded by its sway and stress,
How the deep Ocean rushing from its lair
Bellowed against the hillslopes planted broad ;
While fierce from sea-vast cloudglooms in the air,
Blazoned with dreadful sentences of God
In writhed and quivering lightnings wrought, the rain
Intense of swerveless thunderbolts streamed down,
Crashing amidst the ruins of the town,
And shrieking through the loud inundant main.

VII.

The flood below, the flood above ebbd soon
Completely ; fair and still the green earth lay,
Beneath a heaven surcharged with tenfold day,
More holy-sweet of lustre than the moon.
I gazed : the statues stood there as before,
Like dateless boulders by the old sea-shore :
But of the City's vast palatial pride
Of all the works of Man on every side—

The theatre's stupendous cirque of tiers,
The pharos and the galleons and the piers,
Remained no vestige ; save that here and there,
Bathed in the sea of crystal-lucent air,
Some fragment wall, some column cleft stood dim,
More like strange rocks than structures reared by Him.
Had that swift deluge been the stream of Time,
And every billow some vast age sublime,
Over the vacant City flowing ever
Until a mind should swoon in the endeavour
Such infinite cycles of its course to mete,
ERASURE had been scarcely more complete.

VIII.

The cloud was vanished from the perfect sky ;
Heaven earth and sea all floated from my sight,
Bathed in a dimness of exceeding light
Too pure, intense, and calm for mortal eye.

And yet I saw as we may see in trance,—
Saw how a gradual change beatified
The statues who had never yet replied
When those dread Judgments took dread utterance.

As Memnon woke to music with the dawn,
They in the solemn splendour seemed to rouse

From death to life, with glory on their brows ;
A calm grand life, eyes shut and breath undrawn.

The crystal sea of sky then streamed away,
The inmost Heavens revealed themselves abroad :
A Throne . . . the Vision of the Living God . . .
Ravished and blind upon the earth I lay.

Once more a Voice descended vast and lone,
The Voice of Infinite Love Omnipotent ;
Sweeter than life or death, it swelled and blent
The Universe all tuned into one tone :

“THE SOLDIER WHO HAS FOUGHT THE NOBLE FIGHT,
PERSISTENT FOR THE RIGHT,
ENDURING ALL AND DARING ALL TO PROVE
HIS GLAD UNPURCHASED LOVE
AND FAITHFULNESS, IN TRIUMPH AND DEFEAT :
WHAT DOOM FOR HIM IS MEET ?

THE BATTLE, WITH THE DAY IT FILLED, IS DONE ;
THE FIELD IS LOST OR WON :
LET NIGHT THEN GREET HIM WELL WITH JOY AND REST
BY HOLY VISIONS BLEST ;
THAT ON THE MORROW HE MAY RISE UP STRONG
HOPEFUL AND FRESH AND YOUNG,

HIS SHARP WOUNDS HEALED, TO DO AND DARE ONCE MORE
HEROIC AS BEFORE,—
BUT WITH A LOFTIER RANK, WITH NOBLER POWER,
WITH FAR MORE GENEROUS DOWER.
AND SO FOR EVER THROUGH THE NIGHTS AND DAYS
WHILE HE REMAINETH LORD OF HIS OWN PRAISE,
HE MAY GO ON, EXALTED MORE AND MORE,
TILL FINAL TRIUMPH CROWN THE FATEFUL WAR ;
TILL LOVE AND LIFE AND BLISS (WHICH ONCE WAS
FAITH)
HAVE VANQUISHED WHOLLY EVIL, FALSEHOOD, DEATH ;
THE LOFTIEST STATION THAT HIS SOUL CAN FILL,
THE UTMOST SWAY COMMENSURATE WITH HIS WILL,
THE ALL OF WISDOM THAT HE CAN BELIEVE,
OF LOVE AND GOODNESS THAT HE CAN RECEIVE,
ARE THEN HIS DOWER FROM THE REACHLESS THRONE
AND HIM WHO REIGNS ETERNALLY THEREON."

IX.

I heard it all,—there prostrate on the ground ;
I floated in the Voice as in a sea,
Or as a cloud may float dissolvingly
Within the sapphire noontide's burning bound.
And when it ebbed it left my shrinking soul
To shudder back into its cave of clay,

Blind, hopeless, one dead atom fallen astray
From vital union in and with the Whole.

After a time, from such fierce consciousness
Of personal being as is lunacy—
As not to know is perfectly to be—
I was withdrawn by human utterances :

“O Lord ! let us be hidden, let us die !
Thy love and wisdom are too infinite !
We throb unpeaceful in Thy perfect light,
Star-specks of gloom no Sun can glorify.

“Were we less dark than our old midnight sphere,
Transplant us not into Thy blinding day.
Lord, we adore Thee, Perfect, Sole, for aye—
Our sins and weakness crush our spirits here !”

X.

No answer sounded. I arose and stood.
The gates of Heaven were shut, the Vision gone :
But still undimmed miraculously shone
That tenfold noon of glareless sanctitude.

They stood—the Spirits who had conquered life ;
Erect, yet pleading, hands uplifted, there ;
Glorious—yet wan with that divine despair :
Was *this* the crowning issue of the strife ?

The noble faces slowly turned to where
The dim hills floated, exquisitely drawn
Or interfused, like breathless streaks of dawn,
Upon the breathless ocean of wide air.

Thereon uplifted stood a lofty band ;
Some burning with the glory of their wings ;
Some golden-crowned and purple-robed like Kings ;
Some clad in white, a palm-branch in the hand ;

Some like stern warriors armed with shield and sword ;
Some swaying crystal cups in which the-fire
Of red wine quivered ; while a radiant quire
Striking their harps sang loud with sweet accord.

XI.

“Dear Friends, come ! we wait for you ;
Strong and wise and pure and true.
Why, alas, ascend so few ?

“Where are the myriads that should now be here ?
How have they wasted all the lavish dower
With which God fitted them to rule their sphere—
The Passion and the Vision and the Power ?
For ever hoping, disappointed ever,
We know too well the constant tragic doom :

Vision hath seen, with scarce a work-endeavour,
Then closed its eyes for more voluptuous gloom ;
Passion hath disenshrined the awful soul,
Its large heart tempting fatal fleshly lusts ;
And Power hath shaken off divine control,
To gorge itself with universal trusts.

“For the undone Many, ruth.
Ye have conquered, true to truth ;
Dare our wine of Joy and Youth.

“The tree whose trunk and branches dark and bare
Withstood the storms of Winter, planted strong ;
Doth glorify itself in summer's air
With leaf and fruit and nested bird's blithe song :
The earth-realm labouring blind and dumb and cheerless,
Yet ever onward, through the reign of night ;
Leaps forth with joy majestically fearless
Into the pure new heaven of morning light.
Again stern Winter with its storms shall come,
But find the tree grown stronger 'gainst its wrath ;
Again the night-gloom, weary, blind and dumb,
But find the realm far forward on its path.

“Then dear Friends, come, come away !
Now is Summer, now is Day.
Joy assumes imperial sway !”

XII.

As when the warm spring-breezes overblow
Some silent, frozen, melancholy main,
Its waters heave and throb and rend their chain,
And singing in the sunbeams flash and flow :

So with the breathing of that gracious song
Those Spirits burst their trance of silent sadness ;
Their bosoms heaved with glorious life and gladness ;
Clear-eyed, erect, full-voiced, advanced their throng :

“ O Brothers of this Heaven supreme and glorious !
O Sisters of this greeting full of love !
Into what a dawn of perfect day victorious,
Do ye usher us, and welcome us above !
The World o'erflows with life serene and tender ;
The air, the light is all celestial wine ;
Our inmost soul is interfused with splendour
And harmony divine !

“ As birds the boundless azure sky-deep winging,
As breezes flowing round and round the earth,
As flowers into the vernal welcome springing,
As fountains leaping seaward bright with mirth ;
Our thoughts throughout Infinity float chainless,
Our souls encompass spheres of life sublime,

Our beings thrill and glow with new life stainless,
Our swift joy laughs at Time !

“ The worlds go wheeling far their cycled courses,—
From the fathomless Unbirth of the Abyss,
By golden laws attuning counter-forces
Built up into the noonday Heaven of Bliss :
And pervading all, sustaining all, enwreathing
With Its infinite embrace beneath, above,
The Æther—the Divine eternal breathing
Of Life and Light and Love ! ”

XIII.

So singing they advanced with measured pace ;
And like a silver morning-mist were drawn
Slow floating up the hillside wood and lawn,
Unto that high seraphical embrace.

All stood triumphant, beautiful, divine,
Between the heaven and earth ; all stood there bright ;
Informed, transfigured with the holy light
As crystal cups with sacramental wine.

I would have stood there evermore and gazed
Entranced in adoration, consciousness,
Upon that beauty of all holiness
In human forms embodied and upraised.

Alas ! the universal light too soon
Was fading, flowing backward to its fount,
Until they stood upon that sombre mount
Sole-shining o'er the dark earth as a moon.

And still the glory-stream flowed back to God ;
And they with it were floated up the sky ;
Whose gates shut blank against my straining eye,
And left the earth a dark and soulless clod—

Left all the earth like some most desolate shore
Wherefrom has ebb'd the free and living tide ;
And left me stranded on its dark waste wide,
A wreck to be recovered nevermore.

O Life ! this is thy deepest woe of all—
That as a soul regains its heaven of birth,
The body drags it swooning back to earth,
Stunned, hopeless, blind with its tremendous fall.

XIV.

When I arose the ever ancient Night
Filled with his sombre pomp the earth and sky :
No memories of that doom of dire affright
Perturbed the calm ; and undismayed on high

The moon and stars where they had shone before
Shone on in cold and stern sublimity.

The hills loomed dark upon the silent shore,

Round which the waves in thoughtful monotone
Rolled their old voice of *Ever—evermore*.

A royal City dwelt upon this throne,—

And what now left of all its wealth and pride?
A few strange groups of pallid-gleaming stone!
But Nature cares not for the ruin wide,

Her dreaming beauty glows in perfect bloom:
Most cold, imperial, unlamenting Bride,
Her Lord and Bridegroom scarcely in the tomb. .

The moon sank slowly down from heaven's crest
Pale radiance lined and flecked the eastern gloom;
A stir, a breathing thrilled the world's deep rest;

No wakening bird, half-wakened, here and there
Uttered uncertain warning from its nest;
But spread a cold and fresh and fragrant air,

That seemed with life-giving breath to cleanse away
The grosser shades and vapours everywhere,
And all memorials of the night's dismay,

That pure and odorous the earth might greet
The first divine embraces of the Day,
Now hurrying up the heavens with fiery feet,

The crown of burning gold upon his head,
Cloud-robed with gold and purple, light and heat. .

The Doom of a City.

Ages on ages in their course have shed
Ruin of fire and tempest on the earth,
Uncounted æons of her sons are dead ;
Yet she exults with aboriginal mirth,
Nor feels her frame grow weak, her blood grow cold
But pure and strong and young as at her birth
When first God's hand her glorious path outrolled
For day by day He seals her with His sign—
Night's tomb is rent, the gates of heaven unfold
To let the ever-youngest Dawn divine,
Bathe her in balms of sempiternal youth.
I think no human soul which here doth pine
In personal anguish and with general ruth,
Without these Dawn-evangels fresh from God
Could feel its immortality a truth.
Dear are all dawns ; but this that coming trod
The eastern heavens to kiss the earth's pale brow
With heavenly benedictions, when the rod
Of the Avenging Justice was but now
Withdrawn from penal smittings dire !—what spe
That mortals use, what words of lofty vow
Or soaring chant can emulate and reach
The awe, the bliss, the gratitude, the love,
That saving dawn brought with it from above ?

XV.

What a dawn ascendeth fair through the pure and sil
air,

Fain to greet with holy rapture what a glorious vir
Earth !

From her sins and fears and woes, from her memor
by the throes

Of a fierce regeneration born anew in perfect birth
But what forms, what forms are they, there between
sea-loved bay

And the spiritual hills with the woods that clothe th
feet ;

Human forms erect in power, beasts that crouch :
birds that cower,

But all wrought in fadeless marble, white and shin
pure and sweet ?

Lo ! as ever more and more broadening out the da
doth soar,

Kindling emerald purple golden quivering splende
round her way ;

What a flush—as if of Life kindling with triumphant s
Through the torpid marble—fires them, though t
all so steadfast stay !

Lo ! as ever more and more music with the dawn c
soar,

Breezes whisper, leaflets murmur, waters warble joy
for day ;
What a thrill—as if of Life stirring with triumphant strife
Through the rigid marble—heaves them, though they all
so silent stay !
These are forms that couch and stand, still as marble
fountains grand,
Still in meek victorious patience, till the Sea of Life
arise ;
Till the World-sustaining Sea, Soul of all Eternity,
Once more fill them with Its waters of the Life that
never dies.
When the Royal Sun shall leap glorious on yon eastern
steep,
Gazing grand athwart this province of his measureless
domains ;
Straightway at that conquering sign, straightway at that
glance divine,
Soul shall fill them, stone encarnate, life-blood gush
through all their veins.
And this Nature which doth dream in Titanic sloth
supreme,
Hill and river, wood and meadow, heaven of azure,
careless sea,
Shall have all its want fulfilled, strength employed and
bosom thrilled

By a lordly domination—soul and thought ar
free.
Oh, that these who in this hour shall attain suc
dower,
Consecrated Lords and Bridegrooms weddin
virgin Earth,
Have such holy strength of will, love faith
quenchable,
Wisdom, justice, making concord of inherit
worth,
As shall give a nobler being from the blissful
birth !

XVI.

As one who in the morning-shine
Reels homeward, shameful, wan, adu
From orgies wild with fiery wine
And reckless sin and brutish lust :
And sees a doorway open wide,
And then the grand Cathedral space
And hurries in to crouch and hide
His trembling frame, his branded face
The organ-thunders surge and roll
And thrill the heights of branching st
They shake his mind, they crush his so
His heart knells to them with a moar

He hears the voice of holy prayer,
The chanting of the fervent hymn ;
They pierce his depths of sick despair,
He trembles more, his eyes are dim.

He sees the world-wide morning flame
Through windows where in glory shine
The saints who fought and overcame,
The martyrs who made death divine :
He sees pure women bent in prayer,
Communing low with God above :—
Too pure ! what right has *he* to share
Their silent feast of sacred love ?

How can he join the songs of praise ?
His throat is parched, his brain is wild :
How dare he seek the Father's gaze,
Thus hopeless, loveless, and defiled ?
How taint the pureness—though he yearn
To join such fellowship for aye ? . . .
He creeps out pale—May he return
Some time when he shall dare to stay !

As he within that holy fane,
Was I upon that solemn shore ;
One murky cloud, one spoiling stain,
One jarring note,—all these and more :

A Spectre from the wicked Past,
Familiar with the buried years ;
The joys that fade, the griefs that last,
The baffled hopes, the constant fears ;

The fair, fair dawn of many a day
That sinks in storm-clouds red and wild ;
The souls that in their huts of clay
Are crushed and buried, all defiled ;
The Lusts that rage like savage steeds,
While Will with reinless hand sleeps on,
And drunken Thought but goads their speeds,—
Then one mad plunge, and all is gone ;

The Moods that strew palm-branches now
And with Hosannas fill the sky,
Then shortly crown with thorns the brow
And mock and scourge and crucify ;
The error, guile and infamy,
The waste of foul and bloody strife,
The unforeseen catastrophe,
That make the doleful drama, Life.

Ah, what had I to do with these
Young lovely souls serene and clear,
Awaking up by fine degrees
To life unsullied as its sphere ?

The Spectre that has roamed forlorn,
Sin-restless, through the sombre night ;
Must creep to its old grave at morn,
Nor blot the world of life and light.

XVII.

Where I had left it, on the lonely strand,
Uninjured lay my boat, and lovely ; seeming
Some fair sea-creature, of the midsea dreaming
To light foam-whispers on the yellow sand.

While yet we skimmed the wavelets of the bay,
Methought there rose, ev'n as the sun arose,
A vehement Chorus hurrying to its close—
Fresh as the breath of the awakened day.

With vital fires the morning seemed to glow
While it rang onward like a trumpet-blast
Of keen reveillé crying : NIGHT IS PAST !
AROUSE YE DREAMERS, TO THE DAY AND FOE !

The stars for ever sweep through space, surrounding
Their sun-kings and God's central hidden Throne
With splendour and deep music far-resounding,
Though heard by pure celestial ears alone :
Their music chants His lofty praise for ever,
Their splendours burn to Him the Light Divine ;

In their grand uneager motions pausing never,
They live and sing and shine.

Eternally they sweep on their vast courses,
With solemn joy fulfilling His behest ;
While the balance of stupendous counter-forces
Buildeth up a stable Infinite of rest.
And the Æther, breathing life through vast pulsations,
Thrills with rapture to their God-supported flight ;
And its waves against the rushing constellations
Break in the foam of light.

Each world-sphere groweth grandly through the ages
From its lifeless weltering unsubstantial birth,
Through unnumbered fiery throes and cyclic stages
Till it shines in heaven a life-abounding earth ;
Till its vapours are green fields and glorious oceans,
Till with countless living beings it is rife :
By harmony constraining dread commotions
It is crowned and thronged with life.

Until conscious, doubting, worshipping Immortals,
As they journey on their infinite Life-way,
Passing through its Birth and Death mysterious portals
Inform with spirit-fire the clothing clay :
And the dead, spectral, consciousnessless Material
Is a dwelling-place for essences divine ;

Throbs with thought and passion deathlessly ethereal,
A Heaven-honoured shrine.

All spirits from their infancy's blind sleeping
Must struggle to a strong and noble prime
Through sins, dangers, anguish, terrors,—ever reaping
Costly fruits in every season of swift Time :
From their fountain in its deepest dark foundation,
Glory-shrouded in the shadow of God's Throne,
Through all worlds to their highest soaring station
By unrest all have grown.

Life *is* only by perpetual on-flowing ;
Torpid rest is the true life-devouring death ;
Through stern struggles all things ever are upgrowing ;
Sighs and moanings prove a vital-throbbing breath.
One alone—Eternal, Infinite, All-holy,
Is in changeless rest ; the Perfect grows nor grew :
Finite souls and all things live by progress solely,
All *are* but what they *do*.

PART III.

THE RETURN.

I.

Long tranquil days one more than seven
The beamless sun from out the main
Went burning through the vault of Heaven,
And circled to the deep again :
While day by day in dreamful ease
We glided o'er the glistening seas.

Long calm autumnal nights just seven
The moon with all her starry train
Went shining through the vault of Heaven,
And circled to the deep again :
While night by night in dreamful ease
We glided o'er the glimmering seas.

Long days so rich in rest, so still ;
As warm as love, as calm as truth ;

Long nights which did those days fulfil,
As some sweet girl a fervent youth :
While day and night in dreamful ease
We floated o'er the silent seas.

Time set within his circled sky
A topaz sun, a diamond moon,
And thick star-pearls, and made thereby
A marriage-ring of blissful boon ;
With which in ever-dreamful ease
We floated o'er the happy seas.

Did Nature sleep, and dream in sleep
Of all the Spring and Summer toil
Her children were about to reap,—
The wealth of corn and wine and oil :
As day and night in dreamful ease
We floated o'er the sleeping seas ?

Or was it her deep-thoughted mood ;
A little sad, such loss had been ;
And grieved, the dear Past seemed so good ;
Yet proud, triumphant and serene :
As day and night in dreamful ease
We floated o'er the solemn seas ?

I lay in one long trance of rest
And contemplation,—free from thought

Of Future issue, worst or best
To be from Past and Present wrought :
While day and night in dreamful ease
We glided o'er the trancèd seas.

II.

Before me, in the drowsy night outspread,
The City whence in anguish I had fled
A vast dark Shadow loomed :
So still, so black, it gloomed,
It seemed the darkness of a great abyss
Gulphed in a desert bare ;
Around whose precipice
Dim lamps burnt yellow in the vacant air,
Lifted on high portentous. Yet to me
Its dark suggestions were of Life, not Death ;
Its awful mass of life oppressed my soul :
The very air appeared no longer free,
But dense and sultry in the close controul
Of such a mighty cloud of human breath.
The shapeless houses and the monstrous ships
Were brooding thunderclouds that could eclipse
The burning sun of day ;
Surcharged with storms of such electric life,
Keen as the lightning to its chosen prey,
Curbless and dreadful when aroused to strife. . . .

Who once has gazed upon the face of Death
Unfounds no more its calm with calmest Sleep ;
The terror of that beauty shadoweth
His spirit with an influence too deep.

III.

And while I gazed upon the sleeping City,
And pondered its unnumbered destinies,
A flood of awe and fear and love and pity
Well'd in my heart and overflowed my eyes

With unexpected tears.

The burden of the message I had brought
From that great City far across the sea
Lay heavy on my soul ; as if for years
And years I had been wandering wearily
In travail with it : now the time was spent ;
Now, as a cloud with fire and thunder fraught,
Must give birth with throes of agony,
And perish in the bearing. So I leant
Back in the boat, all desolate and distraught,
My limbs shuddering through the faintness of cold fear
As Death passed his hand across my brow ; but went
To lay its plenary pressure on some heart
That throbb'd true life—'for this poor pulse,' thou
He,

Bearing all peace with him ; when suddenly
That Spirit which will never be withstood
Came down and shook and seized and lifted me,—
As men uplift a passive instrument
Through which to breathe whatever fits their mood,
Stately triumphal march or war-note dread,
Anthem, gay dance, or requiem for the dead ;
And through my lips with irrepressible might
Poured forth its own stern language on the night.

IV.

“ Haughty and wealthy and great, mighty, magnificent,
free,
Empress in thine own right of the earth-surrounding
sea !
Broad and deep flows the river that feedeth thy mighty
heart,
Bringing from all the zones to crowd thine imperial mart
Of all their produce the best—their silks, their gems, their
gold,
Their fruits and corn and wine, their luxuries thousand-
fold :
Thy merchants are palaced princes, thy nobles scorn
great kings,
Thy meanest children swell with pride beneath thy sha-
dowing wings ;

And thy voice throughout the world, complacently serene,
Proclaims 'Of all my Sisters, I am the rightful Queen !
This one is blind, this deaf, and that other is but a mute ;
This one is fair indeed, but drunken and dissolute ;
This is a very slave, dishonoured long ago ;
This one is dying of age, that other of want and woe ;
This one is proud and great, but a heathen in her soul,
And subject to fatal frenzies, raging beyond control :
But I, I am rich and strong, I am wise and good and free ;
Thronèd above them, Empress sole of the earth-surround-
ing Sea !'

"Yes, indeed thy power is great, but thy evil is great
no less,
And thy wealth is poor to pay the debt of thy guiltiness ;
And the world is judged with justice, and thou must
pass through that fire
Which hath tested so sternly the glitter of Venice and
Carthage and Tyre :
For no wealth can bribe away the doom of the Living
God,
No haughtiest strength confront the sway of His chasten-
ing rod.
Repent, reform, or perish ! the Ages cry unto thee :
Listen, oh listen, ere yet it be late, thou swarthy Queen

“Thy heritage vast and rich is ample to clothe
The whole of thy millions of children beyond
need;

One of the two main wheels whereon thy Fate
move

Is that each as he loves himself so shall he his
love :

But thy chief social laws seem strictly framed to
That one be corruptingly rich, another bitterly poor
And another just starving to death : thy fanes
sions proud

Are beleaguered with filthy hovels wherein poor
crowd,

Pining in body and soul ; untaught, unfed by truth
Who are good if they merely dribble bland alms
fatal woes—

Resigning scarcely aught of their pleasure and
content,

Nor dreaming that all their life is one huge embe-

“The sumptuous web of thy trade encompassing
globe

Is fretted by gambling greed like a moth-eaten
Is slimed by creeping fraud, is poisoned by false
breath,

“The mass of thy rulers live with scarcely one noble
aim,
Scarcely one clear desire for a not inglorious fame ;
Slaves to a prudence base, idolaters unto Might,
Jailers of lofty zeal, infidels to pure Right,
Deaf to the holy voice of the Conscience of the World,
Blind to the banner of God when it floats in the storm
unfurled ;
They, and with them the array of thine actual Priest-
hood, thy proud
And numberless Father-confessors,—ineffable crowd
Of scribes who by day and by night, unceasingly blatant,
dictate
Thine every move in the contest with Time the Servant
of Fate.

“Thy flaring streets each night affront the patient skies
With an holocaust of woes, sins, lusts and blasphemies ;
When thy thousands of harlots abroad with the other
thousands are met
Of those who made them first and who keep them harlots
yet :
So dreadful, that thou thyself must sometimes look for
the fire
That rained from heaven on Sodom to make thee one

“Thy Church has long been becoming the Fossil of a
Faith ;
The Form of dry bones thou hast, but where are the
blood and breath ?
Dry bones, that seem a whole, with dead sinews binding
the parts,
Inert save when bejuggled to ghastly galvanic starts :
Though thou swearest to thy people, ‘ The King is but
sick, not dead ’—
Gaining the time while you choose you another in His
stead ;
Though thy scribes and thy placemen all, most of whom
know the fact,
Vouchsafe in His name to write, pretend by His will to act :
Where are the signs of His life ?—While living He never
ceased
To thrill with the breath of His being thy realm from the
West to the East ;
While He lived He fought with sin, with fleshly lust and
pride ;
While He lived His poor and mean were wealthy and
dignified ;
While He lived His reign was freedom, faith, chastity,
peace and love ;
And the symbol borne on his banner was not the raven
but dove ;

While He lived there yawned a Hell with a Devil for his
foes,
and a God-ruled Heaven of triumph before his followers
rose ;
While He lived the noblest of men were wholly devoted
to Him,
The saints, the bards, the heroes, in soul and mind and
limb,—
Who now without a Leader, mournful in silence wait,
arding each one himself to his lonely fight with Fate.

But thou, O Queen, art false : a liar, if He is dead
and becoming a mammoth fossil whose æon is wholly
sped ;
A traitor if still He lives and shall for ever reign,
or thou spurnest the laws most sacred of all He doth
ordain,
Should Christ come now from Heaven, to reap the
harvest sown
When He buried Himself in the earth, watered with blood
of His own,
How many Christians indeed could He gather with strict-
est care
From thy two hundred myriads who claim in Him a share?
He agonised to save thee and thy children all ;
and He saveth scarcely enough to delay thy deadly fall.

“ For fall thou wilt, thou must—so proud as thy state is
now,

Thou and thy sisters all, scarce better or worse than
thou,

If ye do not all repent, and cleanse each one her heart
From the foulness circling with its blood to poison every
part.

Woe to thy pampered rich in their arrogant selfishness ;
Woe to thy brutelike poor who feel but their bread-
distress ;

Woe to thy people who dare not live without hope of
wealth,

Who look but to fruits of the earth for their life and
saving health ;

Woe to thy rulers who rule for the good of themselves
alone,

Fathers who give their children crying for bread a
stone

Woe to thy mighty men whose strength is unused or
sold ;

Thy sages who shut their eyes when Truth is stern to
behold ;

Woe to thy prophets who smile Peace, Peace, when it is
a sword ;

Thy poets who sing their own lusts instead of hymns of
the Lord ;

Thy preachers who preach the life of what they feel to
be death ;

Thy sophists who sail wild seas without the compass of
faith ;

Thy traders trading in lies and in human bodies and
souls ;

Thy good men cursing those better who strive on to
loftier goals :—

The final Doom evolveth, burdened with woe on woe,
Sure as the justice of God while yet by His patience slow ;
For the earth is pervaded wholly, through densest stone
and clod,

With the burning fire of the law of the Truth of the
Living God ;

Consuming the falsehood, the evil, the pride, the lust,
the shame,

With ever-burning unrelenting irresistible flame ;

Until all save the purest spirit, eternal, of truth and love,
Be altogether consumed away, beneath as well as above."

1857.



THE DELIVERER.¹



I WAS a captive. Massive walls sevenfold
 Encompassed all the prison, high and bare ;
The stone, the brass, the iron, the triple gold,
 And yet another which we knew not there.

Year after year I wasted there alone ;—
 Now quiet, crushed beneath that woe immense ;
Now moaning with a weary changeless moan ;
 Now frantic with still-baffled impotence :

And heard at times through all that stony gloom
 The idiotic laugh, the piercing cry
Of others ; each within his living tomb
 Chained wretched, helpless, impotent as I.

Until one eve, when I felt sick to death,
 I found a love-prayer cowering in my heart ;
And clothed it with strong wings of passionate breath,
 And sent it thro' the Heavens to plead our part.

¹ Reprinted by permission from the *Fortnightly Review*.

Dreadful Lord, O gracious God, I know
 That I and all the other captives here
 Have wrought, each for himself, this doom of woe :
 O Thou, All-merciful, bend down thine ear !

O, alas ! what have we for a plea ?
 We are most wretched ; wretched most in this,
 Tho' we strive, we cannot burn to Thee
 To love as Thou to us and all that is."

At same night, when I was fallen asleep
 After such agony of yearning prayer,
 A Voice came gliding through my slumber deep,
 A voice, a glow, a waft of vital air.

We ; and, raising gloom-attenuated eyes,
 They blinked at lustre, but no form could see.
 A Voice rang singing sweet, " Awake, arise !
 And come out hither, and be ever free ! "

And—the fetters kept no longer hold ;
 They walked straight forward through the dungeon-wall,
 Through the others—brass and iron and gold ;
 And passing thro' them felt them not at all.

All the while that Voice sang full and sweet,
 Come forth, come forth, poor captives every one !

Oh, shut not fast your ears when I entreat !
Come forth, and breathe the air and see the sun !”

I thought myself quite free, when, lo ! I found
An adamantine barrier foil me there :
I could not see, could scarcely feel its bound,—
A wall, a curtain woven of pure air.

What poignant anguish pierced my blissful trance,
Thus baffled at the very verge of Heaven !—
“ Dear Angel of divine deliverance,
Assist me here, for I in vain have striven !”

Louder and sweeter rang the glorious Voice,
“ Has one, then, wakened up to feel my breath ?
All holy spirits in your choirs rejoice ;
Another soul is saved from bonds and death !”

The Spirit was beside me dazzling bright ;
It burned the way before me through that wall ;
And I was free beneath the heaven of night,
Nor felt the barrier I passed thro’ at all :

But looking back could see a wall-veil then,
As smooth as glass, opaquely black as jet,
Towering on high beyond my farthest ken ;
But know not by what name to call it yet.

one who almost swooning drinks of wine,
drank in deep the universal air
l glorious freedom of the world divine ;
hen fell down worshipping the Splendour there.

aised me gently as a wounded dove,—
Revere, but worship not, a fellow soul :
ore the infinite Wisdom, Truth, and Love,
The life and breath and being of the Whole.”

was compact of such intense pure flame,
That still mine eyes were shut to It, in sooth ;
e ardour from It thrilled through all my frame
Like new and purer blood, new life, new youth.

kissed my brow with such a ravishment
Of burning bliss that half I swooned away,
d felt my spirit soaring forth unpent
From its dissolving funeral urn of clay.

Henceforward re-assume thy primal dower !
I bless thee unto perfect liberty
holiest faith and love : 'tis in thy power
As thou art now, in heart to ever be.

On earth's most miry ways shall slip thy feet,
This brow itself may catch the evil stain ;

But faith and love can burn thee pure and sweet :
—Farewell, until we may unite again !”

How did these gracious words beneficent
Fill me with dread and agony !—I cried,
“Great Spirit, if it be thy blest intent
To save me truly, leave not yet my side !

“Stay with me yet awhile, Deliverer, Thou !—
I am too weak with chains, too blind with gloom,
For unassisted life ; left lonely now,
I must relapse into that hideous tomb.

“Or at the least, disrobe awhile Thy form
Of its too much effulgence, that my sight
May meet thy face ; and so thro’ every storm
Preserve one Guiding-star, one Beacon-light.”

“Because I burn in my pure nakedness,
Thou canst not meet me with thy mortal gaze . .
Thy prayer is granted : a material dress,
A form of shadowing gloom my soul arrays.”

Oh bliss ! I saw Her thro’ the sevenfold veil ;—
A mighty Seraph shining ruby-clear,
Clothed in majestic wings of golden mail ;
A sun within the midnight atmosphere.

But still her countenance I scarce could scan,
For living glories of the golden hair,
And rapture of the eyes cerulean
As solemn summer heavens burning bare.

Around her head a crystal circlet shone,
Fore-crested with a pure white flying dove :
In emeralds and in sapphires writ thereon,
Athwart the brow, one word was flaming,—Love.

And when she spoke her voice was now so sweet
In soft low music, tremulous with sighs,
That one might dreaming hear his Mother greet
With such a voice his soul to Paradise.

“He is so weak, so weak who should be strong,
Weak as a babe, faint-hearted, almost blind ;
The curse of previous bondage clingeth long :
He must not lapse into that den behind.

“The sun indeed shines ever in the sky :
But when the realm is turned from him to night,
When moon and stars gleam faint and cold on high
Or else are veiled by stormy clouds from sight ;

“The traveller then through field and sombre wood
Finds his own poor dim lamp best guide his feet

The man at home his household taper good
For useful light, his household fire for heat.

“Celestial flowers are set in earthly clay :
However small the circle of a life,
If it be whole it shall expand for aye ;
And all the Heavens are furled in Man and

“So thou, the man, the circle incomplete,
Shalt find thy other segment and be whole ;
Thy manhood with her womanhood shall meet
And form one perfect self-involving soul.

“Thy love shall grow by feeling day by day
Celestial love, thro’ human, blessing thee ;
Thy faith wax firm by witnessing alway
Triumphant faith for ever glad and free.

“By her obedience thy soul shall learn
How far humility transcendeth pride ;
By her pure intuitions shall discern
The fatal flaws of reason unallied.

“Thou shalt see strength in weakness conquer
The bravest action with the tenderest heart,
Self-sacrifice unconscious hallowing
The lightest playing of the meanest part.

“Chastity, purity, and holiness
Shall shame thy virile grossness ; and the power
Of beauty in the spirit and its dress
Reveal all virtue lovely as a flower.

“Till love for her shall teach thee love for all ;
Till perfect reverence for her shall grow
To faith in God which nothing can appal,
Tho’ His green world be dark with sin and woe.

“Children, by all they are to glad and grieve,
Shall teach thee what a loving Father is,
And how to give is better than receive :—
I bless thee with all household charities.

“A priceless boon ! and, like such boons to men,
A glorious blessing or a fatal curse :
Thou canst not sink back into yon vile den ;
Sinking at all, thou sinkest to a worse.”

When thus her words were ended, it might seem
That I was lapsing from a heavenly trance
Into some scarce less blissful earthly dream,
So wonderfully did a change advance.

Her supernatural beauty grew less bright,
Tho’ scarce less beautiful ; the fiery name

Died out like fire ; the wings of flashing light
Were slowly back-withdrawn into her frame.

The Spirit of the empyréan Heaven
Was incarnated into human birth,
The purest Seraph of the loftiest Seven
Became a maiden of this lower earth.

Yet still she was the same, thus different :
The pinions there, tho' not put forth in power ;
The glory there, tho' in the body pent ;—
Both sheathed thus safely till the fitting hour :

And in her mien, and on her face and brow,
And in her violet eyes, as clear the sign
Of Love supreme and infinite shone now
As when it blazed in jewel-fires divine.

.
I woke. A tender hand all silently
Had drawn the curtain and dispersed the gloom ;
The whole triumphant morning in a sea
Of warmth and splendour dazzled thro' the room.

The dearest face, the best-belovèd eyes,
Were shining down upon me where I lay ;—
Aglow with love and rapturous surprise,
Seeing my fever was all passed away.

November, 1859.

A FESTIVAL OF LIFE.



“ The One remains, the many change and pass ;
Heaven's light for ever shines, Earth's shadows fly ;
Life, like a dome of many-coloured glass,
Stains the white radiance of Eternity,
Until Death tramples it to fragments. . . .”

SHELLEY'S *Adonais*.

THE wind, in long gusts roaring,
Over the sea-waste hurled with passionate might
The torrent-rush of ponderous rain down-pouring
Through that unbounded darkness of wild night. . . .
I gazed into the tumult ; seeing naught ;
But mastered by it into solemn thought,
Such as can seldom brood in garish day,—
 Whose myriad sounds and forms and hues
 Their sparkling sensual wine infuse,
Till the soul drowns in its drunken clay.
Night scorns to pamper fleshly ears and eyes
With earth's poor store of fleeting luxuries,
 Appealing to the Soul alone
 In its stupendous Monotone,
Austerely murmuring spells of timeless mysteries.

Long sightlessly outgazing
I stood, when through the cloven dark, behold,
A dome of purest crystal lifted, blazing
With living splendours—purple, jasper, gold,
And crowning all, serenely arched on high,
A solemn depth of sapphire like a sky.
Far-piercing tremulous lines of watery light
And sheeted lustres wild and riven,
Like sunset glories tempest-driven,
It pours against the streaming gloom of night.
Sustaining this aërial canopy
White marble columns gleam unsteadfastly ;
Yet by its hovering poise in air,
It seems self-borne to revel there,
Surmounting furious blasts over the lurid sea.

I stand by it envaulted. . . .
The palace thrills throughout from dome to floor
In swells of jubilant harmony, exalted
By the storm's intermittent clash and roar :
How the full volumes of orchestral sound
Outsurge continuously and sweep around !
As clouds by winds, see, swayed by their sweet measure,
All floating, gliding, sinking, heaving,
The countless Masquers interweaving
An Iris-coloured maze of dizzy pleasure

About the sea-like floor of marble green,
All waved with multitudinous waves, whose sheen
 And restless shades the vision cheats ;
 They seem to flow beneath the feet
Which thrird that graceful dance of festive life serene.

 Around the shorelike border,
Opening to arched recess and far aisle dim,
The feast-spread tables range in stately order.
What golden bowls, a-tremble to the brim,
Beneath the lamps in constellations shine
With jewels and the jewel-gleams of wine !
What fruits are clustered into glórious piles
 Throughout the feast's magnificence,
 On whose uncumbered affluence
Flowers shed the grace of their ethereal smiles !
Round the broad tables sumptuous couches flow,
Soft as June clouds, suffused with many a glow,
 Of crimson, amber, violet dark :
 Deep-dyed from each recesses' arc
The massy curtains fall, down-sweeping full and low.

 And children sport there tameless. . . .
O happy, happy children ! happier far,
Possessed by unsought joyance free and aimless,
Than those tall masks with laboured pleasures are.

Through feast and dance they flit with shining faces,
Wreathing, unwreathing, in capricious chases,
With ringing laughters at their own swift wiles.

And yet a few, of strange grave mood,
Pace in shadowy solitude

Those many-columned labyrinthine aisles,
Which, opening through the oriels, link to zone
The gem-bright feast with dark grey caverned stone :
Though scarcely man or woman dares
That dusk instinct with lightning-glaires,
Down whose far desert vistas waves and tempest moan.

The dome's broad-soaring lustres
Are poised upon one massive coil of gold ;
A ruby-crested serpent, starred with clusters
Of flashing gems ; its mighty bulk outrolled
In cyclic rest for ever ; while, consumed,
The End in the Beginning lies entombed :
Gorgeous the symbol of Eternity !

The grand pilastered sweep of wall
Lives and glows around the hall,
Divinely pictured ; earth and sea and sky
Have yielded the best grandeurs and delights
Of all their rolling seasons, days and nights,
To make these fields of space expand
Into an infinite Wonder-land
By their infinitude of dream-surpassing sights.

Sculptures serenely gracious
From out the flowing draperies' regal dyes,
Around the banquet-circle cool and spacious,
Gleam half-revealed to my enchanted eyes.
How can the festival flow undelayed
Amidst the heavenly visions here displayed?
How is it not rapt still, in breathless trance?—
What scenes of rock, field, sky and sea,
Flung round in infinite harmony!—
That wood where uncouth creatures sport and dance
In the weird dimness streaked with silvern rays:
That Eden quivering in the noontide blaze,
Nymphs languid in its fountain-bowers:
That sea-built City's domes and towers
Consuming in the Sunset's slow-breathed fiery haze!

“Evohe! our high Palace!
We dance, we dance, with dance-exulting feet!
We grow immortal, draining bowl and chalice
Of this life-burning wine-blood nectar-sweet,
And banqueting on this ambrosial food!
While ever and anon, in rapturous mood
Outstealing from the revel, pair by pair
Hide far within some dim recess,
And, faint with fervid eagerness,
Unlock the wildering wealth of love they share!

What though black Night inspheres us,—storm and rain
Assaulting this fair Heaven with fury vain?

Our music-storm poured strong and fast
Can balance well the outer blast,
And yon resplendent dome for evermore sustain !”

With clash of wine-cups ringing,
So rose from flower-crowned feasters swaying there
The fervent Pæan, swelled with choral singing
By many a gallant Knight and lady fair.
What strength of wisdom and sure self-reliance
Could make *these* bold to fling such gay defiance
To all the dreadful Powers of ancient Night?—

These—pigmies swarming in the deep
Beneath their own dome’s burning sweep ;
These—motes invisible beneath Heaven’s height !
But ere was ended the impetuous song,
A tremor ran electric through the throng :
With pallid cheek and restless eye,
With urgent voices loud and high,
Fear made them more and more the vauntful strains
prolong.

“Ha ! what a burst of thunder !
How the swift lightnings blanched our splendours pale !
Reweave the links of dance, too long asunder !
Let loose again the music’s life-gale ! . . .

But who are these, this never-bidden Pair,
Unnoticed while our joy-song dimmed the air ?
Who are these masked in such mysterious wise ?
 What twain of all our company
 Are missing from the revelry ?—
They have assumed this melancholy guise
To shed fantastic wildness on our sport.
All here !—then who are Ye, not of our court ?
 Whence come ye ? wherefore thus invade
 Our blissful brightness with the shade
Of sombre masks and robes, and joy-contemning port ? ”

 Silent and dark and solemn,—
While the mixed tumult of amazement died
In deep hushed awe,—firm-planted as the column
Of dusky-splendid porphyry at their side,
The Strangers stood, absorbing all the scene
With slow calm eyes and wonder-baffling mien ;
Two awful Spirits of the outer Night !
 For age-like moments that ensued
 The Saturnalian multitude
Was frozen into marble undelight ;
Continued numb with terror,—lost and drowned
In that weird breathless agony profound,
 Like a Nightmare’s stifling pain
 Crushing, maddening heart and brain,
When utter, monstrous Silence yawns like death around.

Till life, resurgent, tingled
In burning blood through every shrunken vein ;
And one deep panting from all breasts commingled
To mark remission of that deadly strain
And over tension of the subtle strings
Whose music is the life of living things. . . .
Again with joy and power from secret caves
 The full dance-harmonies outstreaming
 Woke the Masquers from their dreaming,
Again they floated on the buoyant waves.
And all, it seemed, with fiercer yearning thirst,
Triumphant o'er the pallid swoon now burst,
 Seized the fiery cup of bliss
 Mantling high to greet their kiss ;
And in delirious draughts awe doubt and fear immerst.

 The dim voluptuous languor
Of clouds surcharged with perfumes, slow and dense
Uprolled from precious burnings, veiled the clangour,
The harmonized confusion grown intense,
Reckless, and surging with a wild desire
Most keenly hungered when most fed, like fire ;
—Veiled the vast revel, even from their seeing,
 Whose Bacchic frenzy broken loose
 Was now the element profuse
That breathed it into such portentous being.

And few of all involved in this rich screen
Saw now the Strangers of mysterious mien ;
 Whose dark intolerable eyes
 Burned through the tumult and disguise,
Commanding like Omniscience all the wildered scene.

 But power to me was given
To see, to pierce the gloomy robes austere,
Which (as our world's gross night hides Hell and
 Heaven,
From mortals sick with longing, wild with fear)
Concealed these Two in undistinguished shade.
I saw the Vision of a Queen, arrayed
In midnight purple laced with snowy cloud,
 Which as her bosom heaved shone far
 With purest jewels, star on star. . . .
Grand Queen ; dread Pythoness : her tall form bowed :
Transcendent beauty lost in desolate grace :
Her long dark hair thrown down about a face
 So pale with awful mysteries
 Of perfect love and woe and bliss,
That my own heart grew wild panting for her embrace.

 But, Heaven be our protection
Against the Demon standing at Her side !—
By what dread lunacies of blind affection,
Or monstrous Destiny to Her allied !

Infernal Horror !—His rent forehead crowned
With hideous snakes writhing and interwound,
A many crested coil distinguishless ;
 While through black cloud with red fire sea
 His vast and fleshless frame appeared
Momently shuddering into Nothingness.
On His disfeatured face was stamped a grin
Of unimagined foulness, hate and sin,
 Anguish, greed, and rage and scorn,
 And fiendish triumph most forlorn. . . .
Thus stood They side by side amidst the festal din

 Wilder and ever wilder
The revel surged beneath its glowing dome ;
And still the outside rage grew ever wilder,
As if all powers that have in Night their home,
Lightning and thunder, rain and stormy blast,
Held *their* wild revel in its sightless vast. . . .
Then those Two Shapes were moved from stony re
 And, keeping still their sable shroud,
 Moved forward mingling with the crowd ;
Each with a strange keen eagerness repress.
He seized an aged yet carousing Knight ;
She kissed a young girl's forehead drooping white ;
 These dancing linked in languid grace,
 Those hurrying forth with swerveless pace,

Soon through a curtained portal passed from out our
sight.

There rose shrill lamentation
From revellers fixed awaiting their return ;
Inexplicable grief and consternation
Possessed them,—dread yet keen desire to learn
The fate of those led forth so suddenly ;
And tremulous murmurings spread. . . . Then all
might see
Those Shapes mysterious coming back alone. . . .
The Silence gave one reckless shout,
“The Knight was old and wearied out,
The Maid was sick and faint some hours ago :
These have but ushered them to rest and peace,
In sooth full kindly—But why therefore cease
The banquet and the dance? Away!
Every moment of delay
Is squandered from our joy’s brief unreturning lease.”

The rude spell fearless-hearted
Swayed back the riant feast-joy’s ebbing flood :
But one—the Lover of the girl departed—
Approached the Woman desperately, and sued
With passion such as will not be denied
For reunion with his promised bride.

She led him forth in Her divine embrace ;
And then returned without the boy,
Inspired by some exalted joy,
Which shone with holy splendour in Her face,
And bounded in Her port and heaved Her breast. . .
But of the remnant every one repress
In silence of uneasy thought
The wonder that within him wrought :
The mystery had power to awe down open quest.

Thenceforth a voice of wailing,
Of grief that spurned all comfort, still increast,
For dear ones lost for ever, countervailing
The shouted songs and laughters of the feast ;
Whose wine ran like a mountain rill, which grows
In strong and swift abundance as it flows.
For the dread Strangers thinned the joyous rout ;
With stern and Fateful ministry
Removing almost momentarily
Man, woman, child, youth, maid,—selected out
By some inscrutable and lawless law.
Many to Her went willingly, I saw ;
And fascinated by the bliss

But it was shameful, fearful,
To mark of those He gestured to His side
How many shrank, with ravings wildly tearful
Of idiot pleas ; while stalwart feastmen cried
“ Grant us but one more hour of wine-fired glee !
Others may fail ; but we, Iacchus ! we
Could mount high revels with the mounting sun.”

A few with high-wrought calmness grand
Took His stretched imperious hand,
And seemed, though then all powerless and undone,
To cope with His Omnipotence of Fate,
Yielding at once with undissembled hate.

But trembling wretches clustered near,
Already summoned forth by Fear
To time-destroying pangs no doom could aggravate.

O infinite tempest raging !
O awful Visitants from Heaven and Hell !
These mortals scorn and mock your dark presaging,
And wreak high feast-strains on their own deep knell.
See, through the clouds of incense wildly glancing,
What Mœnads with wild cries are wildly dancing !
All masks off-torn, their white limbs flash and shine,
Flung out tossing through the whirls ;
Dishevelled tresses, wanton curls,
A-flame with flowers and dripping crimson wine,

ish naked bosoms with their fiery trace,—
ite, perfect breasts, full-swelled to the embrace
Which those wild eyes of humid light
Fiercely passionate now invite :—
e Palace, through their whirlwind, seems to reel in space.

Alas, how sad and dreary
ned the whole scene there as the Night grew late !
en many of the Masquers, sick and weary,
y longing that those Ministers of Fate
uld choose them for removal : when of all
om They had taken from the festival
one returned ; though mourners fiercely craved
The never answering Shapes of Black
To bring them, but a moment, back,
d on the threshold of the Night-storm waved
eir feeble torches, quenched as soon as lit,
king lost darlings through the Infinite :
And when at times some dreadful ghost,
Imaging the loved and lost,
uld through the startled feast with bodeful gestures
flit . . .

The lamps were quickly failing ;

Flapping about the corpselike sculptures wan :
The floor, the cupola which glimmering shone,
The rain-dark marbles, in the tempest thrilled :
 Where late the noble feast was spread
 Lay scattered flower-blooms dim and dead,
'Mid stains of sullen-oozing wine outspilled
From urns and goblets shattered and o'erthrown,
And fragments in a sick confusion strown ;
 And lost in all the ghastly waste,
 On couches tottering and displaced,
Flushed victims of the orgy, helpless, senseless, prone.

 Yet evermore those Strangers
Went gathering in their harvest ; and no less,
As men who face to face with deadly dangers
Inebriate their terror and distress,
A few kept up the revel with a madness
Of reeling, shrieking glee which was not gladness.
Till—portents of the near approaching Doom—
 Wailings, laughter, wild and fierce,
 Through the storm-swung darkness pierce,
And spectres people the dull flickering gloom. . . .
A deep foreboding hush pervades the place :
To that dis-covered Twain in one wild race
 All reel along the quaking floor :
 There grows a mighty booming roar,
As I am rapt away into the outer space.

With storm and fire and thunder
These rearward billows of Night's Ocean dash
Against the Palace : it is rent asunder,
Rent, shattered, with an instantaneous crash.
On, undelayed, exultingly they sweep,
Whirling its fragments through their wild waste deep
Precipitant in their stupendous sway

 The glowing fragments crystalline,
 Gold, jewels, precious marbles, shine
Like showering meteors ; high and far away,
Portentous, the Snake's blazing wheel is borne,
In dalliance with the lightnings whose fierce scorn
 Smites into view wan wailing shades . . .
 The whole Night-Chaos hurrying fades
Over the livid sea, before the dismal morn.

 " O utter desolation !
O blighted beauty, splendour, triumph, bliss !
Alas, the gay and thoughtless congregation
Flung out unsheltered to the dark Abyss !
Bright Vision faded ! never more can shine
A joy-inspiring Palace so divine."
Lamenting thus, I sank in sleep or swoon. . . .

Has bent its dome's immeasurable height ;
A few calm clouds o'erfraught with living light
Melt in the quivering crystalline ;
Beneath the Eternal Sun divine,
Inspiring half the world in glory and delight.

 This is the Vision solely,
Trancing all aspiration with content !
Beauty all-perfect, blessedness all-holy,
Are veiled beyond that crystal firmament.
The breathless concave yearneth to the Hymn
Of all the Hosts of Stars and Seraphim ;
The Hallelujah's raptured Monotone,
 To whose vast swell the world-strewn Sea
 Of Æther throbs eternally,
Circling the footstool of that nameless Throne
Whose veil's far shadow floods this noon with light. . .
—O self-sequestered Earth ! O gross, weak sight !
 For which beneath such heavenly day
 Yawneth fathomless for aye
A spectre-haunted gulf of Sphere-completing Night.

February, 1857.

TASSO TO LEONORA :

FROM HIS DUNGEON ; IN MISERY AND DISTRACTION.

—o—

“ Ha ! thy frozen pulses flutter
With a love thou dar’st not utter. . . .
Lady, whose imperial brow
Is endiademed with woe !
.
.
.
All the wide world beside us
Show like multitudinous
Puppets passing from a scene ;
What but mockery can they mean ? ”

SHELLEY—*Misery ; a Fragment.*

NOBLEST Lady, throned above
All my soaring hopes of love ;
Could you read my fate’s dark truth,
You would give me scornless ruth.

Dawn by dawn I wake to say,—
I *will* drive all thought away
Of Her I cannot hope to win ;
Vain regret is coward sin.

Yet each night I yearn to be
Wandering far alone with thee,
Through still Dreamland's dimmest grove
Moonlit by thy heavenly love.

Ah, the long days dark and cold !
Life, bereft of thee, unsouled—
Save for Memory !—crawls on slow,
One sick swoon of barren woe.

Ah, the long nights dreadly still !
When sleep flies my frantic will ;
When through filmy dreams its sting
Consciousness darts quivering.

But when rich Sleep's nectar'd balm
Bathes my weary heart in calm ;
Life, Strength, Joy are all re-found,
With thy pure love glory-crowned.

Thus thou hast my soul unsphered ;
Waking life is dead and weird ;
Deathlike trance is life :—ah me !
All our being seems to be
Interfused with mockery.

Yes—as Love is truer far
Than all other things ; so are

Life and Death, the World and Time,
Mere false shows in some great Mime,
By dreadful mystery sublime.

Do not scorn me, Sweet, I crave ;
Perhaps this woe may somewhat rave :
Yet how should It?—I can feel
Truth itself at times less real.

Do not scorn me,—for behold !
Near and Nearer swiftly rolled
Solemn glooms of that great Night
No false day shall dawn to blight.

Then the everlasting sleep,
Shall our souls in rapture steep,
Then in tranced Eternity
Thou shalt be made One with me !

Play our parts out in this Mime !—
Spectres mocking spectral Time,
Whose grim mockery keeps us hurled
Reeling through our spectral World.

What a Theatre expands !
For its Stage all seas and lands ;
By the moon and high stars lit ;
Vaulted by the Infinite.

Heavens ! and I must bear a part,
With my restless passionate heart
Coffin'd in this foul dead den
From the surging seas of men.

Well . . . we all must act our time
On the unreal Stage sublime ;
None of us is what he seems,
Dramatizing frenzy-dreams.

By such monsters fleered, stung, tost,
In such wildering mazes lost ;
How superbly serious all
Thread the restless, senseless brawl
Of our rabid Carnival !

Noble, beautiful, serene,
Thou must play the part of Queen ;
Crowned with unreal gems and gold,
Phantom purples round thee rolled.

Sweep with stately step the stage ;
Act great passions, love and rage,
With yon crowd of half-souled things
Masked as nobles, princes, kings.

I must act a wretch forlorn,
Wealthless, rankless, lowly born ;

Cursed more with a soul and sense
Bounteous, regal, too intense :

Ay, a woeful Wretch indeed ;
Say a starved incarnate Need,
Ever with consummate art
In his strange half-tragic part
Living on an empty heart !

Well, Dear, brief must be our task ;
Little matters in what mask
We may rant our mimic rage
On our unsubstantial Stage.

So, Sweet Love, sustain your rôle,
Freeze the pulses of your soul ;
Fair, grand, queenly dignified,
Case yourself in marble pride.

I—the while,—by evidence
Of my purest love intense,
Sure that when the Play is o'er
You are mine for evermore—

I will madly waste and moan,
Pouring out against thy throne
All my life of love,—flung back
In wild foam o'er gulfs of black.

Let some hollow princely mask,
In thine Alpine sunshine bask ;
Blight me with well-feignèd scorn ;
Let me pine and rage forlorn :

Have it counted lunacy,
My audacious love for Thee !
In a lazar-dungeon thrust,
Make me mad to prove you just.

Brava, Dearest ! noble, grand !
Played with wondrous self-command !
O great Theatre world-filled,
Whom her spell holds rapt and thrilled,
Shout the plaudits too long stilled !

I, too,—do not I act well
All the horrors of this Hell ?
Act so well, Love, that I feel
Sometimes as if all were real !

What a sickly, foolish fear !
Love soon re-assures me, Dear :
I must ape such anguish vile
With an inward settled smile.

Do I seem to writhe with pain
Under thy assumed disdain ?

Do I seem, indeed, to be
Far too mean for hope of thee?

Do I really seem to brood
In this dark den's solitude,
Phrenzied by the foetid gloom
Of such hideous living tomb?

Do I seem to cringe, and crave
Mercy from the poor dull slave,
Who, disguised in sceptred power,
Acts thy brother for the hour?

Yet I scorn him : and serene,
Far above this mimic scene
With its shows of Space and Time,
Dwell with thee in love sublime.

Ah ! your part so grand and fine
Must be harder yet than mine ;
Bitter, but to *seem*, in sooth,
False to love's eternal truth :
Ah ! you have my saddest ruth.

Still, our parts are so forth writ
In this Mime whose venom'd wit
Our poor wits so far transcends.
On its acting life depends,
Wild it is, but soon it ends.

Joy ! the Play must soon be done !
Then the lamps called Stars and Sun
Shall be quenched in perfect gloom
By the grand foreclosing Doom ;

Then the Stage of land and sea
Shall down-vanish utterly ;
Then the fretted azure roof
Roll off like a burning woof ;

Then the serried multitude
Surge out in a vast dim flood ;—
All, all fade and vanish quite,
Leaving void and silent Night.

Then, once more alone, my Sweet,
We shall in the strange dark meet :
You will doff your tinselled pride,
I shall throw my rags aside.

Then in silent darkness deep
Comes the everlasting sleep,
Comes the inexpressive bliss
Of our union's perfectness !

Time's loud turbid stream shall flow,
With its perils, strife and woe,

Far from where our Soul then lies
Tranced in still Eternities :

Tho', soft breathed, from far away,
Its dim soothing murmurs may
Lull us to profounder rest,
Swaying with the Ocean's breast.

For we seek home after this ;
Clinging with a fonder kiss
For the parting which so pained,
For the cold neglect you feigned.

We two only,—Woman, Man,
Wedded ere the Mime began,
Heaven-created Man and Wife
For our whole true timeless life :

Soul of soul and heart of heart ;
Each alone a wretched part,
Lifeless, useless, maimed, unright,
Ever yearning to unite

In the perfect spherul Whole,
Living, self-sufficing Soul,
Swayed through Æther crystalline
Circling restful in the shine
Of the central Sun Divine. . . .

What, although this trance at times
Must be broken by such mimes ?
What, though we must earn by these
Our reposeful ecstasies ?

Dearest, all the false cold days,
With their bitter mocking Plays,
Swiftly die to glorious Night
When we meet in new delight.

So two actors, Man and Wife,
Mimic freely rage and strife,
Suffering, terror, madness, death,
Whatsoe'er the fable saith :

Earning thus wherewith to feed
That which is their life indeed,—
Long, calm, rich with love intense,
Secret from the shallow sense
Of the blatant audience.

Ah, my weak bewildered heart !
Do I act my monstrous part
With too earnest lifelike truth ?—
Darling, bless me with thy ruth.

Yes, at times my heart is torn
By thy well-pretended scorn :

Soothe this foolish heart of mine
With some secret loving sign.

Perhaps it feeleth Love to be
Of such sacred verity,
That thy merely feigned untruth
Frets it like a serpent-tooth.

Grant it some dear secret sign
Which no other can divine,—
But a word, a flower, to prove
That you are my own, own Love.

Act thy strange part not so well ;—
Even now, with pangs of Hell,
I dread that your neglect is true,
Doubting you, my Soul's Soul, *you* !

But I strangle such base doubt. . . .
How the drear plot lingers out !
What a Chaos, baffling thought ;
Real with spectral interwrought ! . . .

Lo, the wondrous Universe !
Hear its mystic powers rehearse
Sweet and subtle melodies,
Vast and solemn harmonies.

Glorious shifting sceneries, see ;
And the dome's infinity,
Lamp'd by all the rhythmic quires
Of those unconsuming fires !

Mark the stony Fate that broods,
Mark the angel multitudes,
Watching for the tragic range
Of impassioned strife and change.

O sublimest Theatre !
Vexed with the insensate stir
Of this doleful Mime distraught,
By such pigmy puppets wrought.

Pigmies : and they feel it well,
While their hollow vauntings swell :
How uneasily they roam
Through its grandeurs, not at home !—

Restless in its crystal calms,
Trembling at its thunder-psalms,
Cowering from its noon-poured light,
Shuddering through its scenic night.

How their poor rants quail and die
Far beneath its solemn sky !

How their clouds of passion all,
Tumid grandeurs ; burst and fall
From its deep-based mountain-wall !

Blood and filth defile the Stage,
Filth of lust and blood of rage ;
Which they will not understand
Are but self-pollution, and
Suicide at second-hand.

Every one there, bad or good,
Is by all misunderstood,
Knowing not himself,—yet strives
To scheme the law for countless lives.

Each is different from each,
None hears right another's speech :
Yet all fume and fight for aye,
With anguish, hatred, death, dismay,
To make others be as they.

Every step they take perplex
Taints the freedom of the next ;
Every thought and word and deed
Curbeth all that shall succeed :

Yet they still must move, nor pause,
By the Drama's rigorous laws ;

Yet no true Life can there be
Save in thoughts and deeds quite free.

There work foolish Hate and Ill,
Eager, subtle, fierce of will;
Good and Love, alas, behold,
Flagging, wavering, languish cold.—

Love!—O Seraphs looking down,
Who of all that wear the crown,
That have won the sacred kiss
Which should symbol Love's pure bliss,
Even dream what true Love is?

Sternly real the galling pain
Of the vanquished bondman's chain;
But the Victor's diadem
Ever lacks its crowning gem.

Nearly all the noblest parts
Ruined by bad heads or hearts ;
Those in whom redemption lies
Chained, with cankering energies,
From sublime activities.

Each aspiring burst, swayed back,
Soon plods round the old drear track ;
Hope dies,—strangled in the knot
Of such ever-ravelled plot.

Did no sequent acts extend
On unto a perfect End
Far beyond these brief life-days,
What a hopeless, ghastly maze !

Yes ! did'st Thou not light the scene,
Leonora, O my Queen !
One deep sigh would rend my heart,
“Oh, that I had had no part !” . . .

As it is,—to keep, perchance,
Sane amid the dizzy dance—
Muse I this fixed truth sublime,
All is but a mocking Mime.

Yet foul demons ⁱⁿ my ear
Hiss most wordless hints of fear,—
That this hideous dream's wild strife
Is our soul's substantial life !

How the moment's thought appals !—
That these stifling dungeon-walls
Are of real during stone ;
That I fester here alone ;
That you cannot be my own !

No ; it is a fiendish lie.
God our Father reigns on high :

You are truer than my faith. . . .
Oh, were life untwined from death !

But, you cannot scorn me, Dear,
Though I sink in doubt and fear ?
You too know, this mad Mime done,
We shall evermore be one ?

Cling, cling fast to this dear faith,
Rock of life in sea of death :
Our mazed web of doom is wrought
Under God's directing thought.

For were life no flitting dream,
Were things truly what they seem,
Were not all this World-scene vast
But a shade in Time's stream glass'd ;

Were the moods we now display
Less phantasmal than the clay,
In which our poor spirits clad
Act this Vision, wild and sad,
I must be mad, mad,—how mad !

November, 1856.

A HAPPY POET.



DRIVEN by mysterious care and restless pain

The World rolls round me full of noise and strife,
Racking what is not loss to dubious gain :

I live apart my self-fulfilling life
Serenely happy, breathing golden air
Unvext by these dark storms of pain and care.

The tumult whirls for ever to and fro :

I see it all in vision ; strangely wild
And incoherent, yet by some rich glow
Of vigour, thought and passion reconciled ;
Its mystery also, wherein dreams Delight,
Brings dear old friends, tho' dimly, back to sight.

O happy-dowered Soul ! whom God doth call

To Life's imperial Banquet as a guest
Greeted with gladness in its lofty Hall ;
Bathed clean and cool, sprinkled with odours, drest

In fair white folds of free and flowing grace,
The festal raiment of the splendid place ;

Who then is couched 'midst wise and valiant friends,
In place of honour near the glorious Throne
Wherefrom the Host such kingly welcome sends
That all may feel His treasures all their own ;
And who is further gifted to divine
The subtlest savours of the fruit and wine.

Is it not strange ? I could more amply tell
Such woes of men as I discern or dream,
Than this great happiness I know so well,
Which is in truth profounder than they seem ;
And which abides for ever pure and deep,
Beneath all dreams of wakefulness or sleep.

For this whole world so vast and complicate,
With every being nourished on its breast,
With all its mighty workings-out of Fate,
With that one Soul in all its life exprest,
Must surely all be mine, and mine alone ;
Its power and joy are so indeed my own.

Spring, summer, autumn, winter, float for aye,
Weaving continually their wondrous robe,
Of purple Night inwrought with golden Day
About our earth, whose calm and mighty globe

Through all the World-strown æther crystalline
Floats ever circling round the sun divine.

The faint voluptuous trance of summer noon,
 Young spring's blithe tenderness so green and fair,
The golden wealth of quiet autumn boon,
 The star-keen life of winter glittering bare,
Carol harmonious beauty and delight,
And proffer all their treasures as my right.

The birds rejoice in singing for my joy,
 And shaking sunshine thro' the clustered leaves :
A brain that never plotteth them annoy,
 A heart that loves them and their injury grieves,
Swift bird and beast and jewelled insect free
Full well can trust ; one brotherhood are we.

The flowers all love me, and the trees befriend ;
 Lily and rose are eager to impart
By fragrance, colour, or some perfect bend,
 Delicious secrets that surprise my heart ;
I muse beneath the forests, and they are
With all their countless tongues oracular.

Snow-vested mountains mighty and austere
 Persuade me : Climb us from thy lowly home,
And we will be thine Altars ; offer here
 From our pure silence to yon naked dome

Thy sacrificial thoughts, in breathless awe
And adoration of Eternal Law.

And evermore old Ocean murmurs me :

Come forth, and love our heritage, my Child ;
Safe-cherished on my bosom shalt thou be

In death-sweet calms, in tempests dark and wild ;
Cadence of moonlit waves and mid-sea moan
Shall dower thy Voice with many a mystic tone.

O vaulted sky, O bounteous land and sea,

O perfect World, the Palace and the Shrine
Of infinite beauty, truth and mystery,

That flood the soul with yearning bliss divine
Till it dissolves in their exuberant might,
As some frail cloud surcharged with noon's full light.

The banquet-hall is noble, and its wine

A nectar worthy of Olympian lyres ;
Solemn and sacred is the infinite shrine,

With stars immortal for its altar-fires ;
Yet shrine and palace are scarce noticed things
When all the guests and worshippers are kings :

Imperial all ; each freer than the sun

Doth live and move, supreme, self-centred, sole ;
And yet they are my people, every one ;

My life of heart and brain is in the whole ;

Their hopes, fears, woes, joys, virtues, sins, despairs,
Their full-orbed lives are mine no less than theirs.

The stern exultance of the thoughtful youth
 Enrolled against the tyrants of his land ;
The noblest victor's self-contemning ruth
 When fireless eye must gaze on bloody hand ;
The greed of power, the sateless lust of pride,
Whence kingly robes in blood are purple-dyed ;

The deep complacency of subtle skill
 In ravelled games, though winning wins a loss ;
The drear perversity with which one's will
 With wretched consciousness persists to cross
His own best good, his dearest friends' best prayers,
* Devouring sullenly their generous cares ;

The fogs of fear in which their fellows loom
 Like threatening monsters, and the firm earth yields ;
The mists of hope and love-joy which illumine
 With golden strangeness their poor homes and fields ;
The sophistries of passion-moulded thought
By which they use to make "I would," "I ought :"

Free childhood's life, so rich it need not ask
 Poor thought to justify its flower-fresh grace ;
Youth's yearning tumult when the constant mask
 Seems falling first from Nature's glorious face,

The infinite joy and sadness of its strife
To probe the awful secrets of our life ;

The firm deliberate strength of manhood's prime,
Appraising well the World, its smiles and frowns,—
Yet for the spoils and triumphs of this Time
Ceding the heirship of eternal crowns ;
Old age with Heaven's first rays upon its brow,
Yet clinging feebly to the worn-out Now :

His nature who from action will refrain
In plenitude of spiritual thought,
And his who keepeth every nerve a-strain
In constant labour, hope and fear distraught ;
(In thought's pure æther float all worlds of life ;
The cold eye sees, warm being lives through strife) :

Those eagle spirits native to the skies
Who drink the Sun's bare splendour, and contemn
Such painted screens as unanointed eyes
Must interpose between His shine and them,—
The veils and imageries through which their sense
Alone can bear the formless light intense ;

(But Suns shine spheric to the eagle-eye,
Though formless to the owlet-sight, when bare) :
The soul opprest with its humanity,
Which must have God's most personal love and care ;

The self-ruled souls, that need not supplicate,
Feeling themselves divine and peers of Fate :

All, all are mine, are Me. How vast the Stage !

Imperious Doom, unvanquishable Will,
Throughout the Drama constant battle wage ;
The Plot evolves with tangled good and ill ;
The passions overflow the shores of Time ;
With God the full Solution waits sublime.

If I so much contemplate all the scene
As if to pleasure me the whole were wrought,
I gaze upon the actors great and mean
With reverent love, with unaccusing thought ;
Their wails and curses are mine own no less
Than their most tranquil strains of nobleness.

And yet, how ever-gracious is my dower,
Whose noon-tide bliss consumes its first alloy,
Whose midnight woe by some celestial power
Enkindles purest stars of solemn joy :
My lover glows, the world is all June-bowers ;
My widower weeps, the tears rain April-showers.

For I must sing of all I feel and know ;
Waiting with Memnon passive near the palms,
Until the heavenly light doth dawn and grow
And thrill my silence into mystic psalms ;

From unknown realms the wind streams sad or gay,
The trees give voice responsive to its sway.

For I must sing ; of mountains, deserts, seas,
Of rivers ever flowing, ever flowing ;
Of beasts and birds, of grass and flowers and trees
For ever fading and for ever growing ;
Of calm and storm, of night and eve and noon,
Of boundless space, and sun and stars and moon :

And of the secret sympathies that bind
All beings to their wondrous dwelling-place ;
And of the perfect Unity enshrined
In omnipresence throughout time and space,
Alike informing with its full control
The dust, the stars, the worm, the human soul :

And most supremely of my human kin ;
Their thoughts and deeds, their valours and their fears,
Their griefs and joys, their virtue and their sin,
Their feasts and wars, their cradles and their biers,
Their temples, prisons, homes and ships and marts,
The subtlest windings of their brains and hearts.

In all their faiths and sacraments I see
Celestial features through the earthly veil,
In all their dreams some deep reality,
In all their structures beams that cannot fail,

In all their thoughts some truth which doth inspire,
In all their passions sparks of quenchless fire.

For singing, in all thoughts I glimpse the law
Ineffable, eternal, veiled behind,
And robe it in full verse-folds dark with awe ;
And singing, in all passions I must find
New secrets more impassioned, crowning them
With golden words, a fulgent diadem.

So heartless gibes of infidel mistrust,
And quibblings spun by some poor wretch to snare
His conscience into sanction of his lust,
Or bind it into cowardly despair,
Come forth from me the universal Nay
That limits all our life's triumphant Yea.

So softest sighings of a maiden's heart
When first Love's fingers touch the trembling chords,
Thrill through my soul with their delicious smart,
And fly abroad from me new-winged with words
So bright and beautiful and swift to soar
That all must love them now and evermore.

I sing, I sing, rejoicing in the singing,
And men all love me for my songs so sweet,
Even as they love the rapturous lark upspringing
And singing loud his joy the sun to greet ;

happiest lot, to win all love and blessing
That whose own delight is past expressing !

Men in truth not joyous strong and whole,
But lofty strains thro' broken lyres expressed ?
My frame is all attuned to my soul,
My limbs are glad to do my mind's behest ;
I wander through the wide realm many a day,
Free as thoughts that wander every way :

I climb the mountain brow thro' moonlit gloom,
With vigorous breathing of its lonely air,
I watch the tranced dawn from out her tomb
To perfect resurrection waking there :
I revel through the storm when fire and rain
And thunder make a man all heart and brain :

I pierce the inmost heart of solemn woods,
Where our great Mother coucheth grand and dim,
And baring her full breast in solitudes,
Suckles each child as if she had but him,
With that same milk magnificent and bold
Whence Gods and Titans drew their strength of old ;

I plunge away from earth on lonely shores
And breast the green sea-surges foaming strong,
Free as an eagle when it sways and soars
The billows of the tempest-sea among ;

To sail alone the deep, past rocks and caves,
From isle to isle upon the heaving waves :

To row adown great rivers from their rills,
Gliding thro' dawn and eve and noon and night,
Winding between the patient woods and hills,
The broad green meadows, fields and gardens bright;
Past homesteads each sole-sacred as a star
Gleaming thro' clustered foliage near and far ;

Past peaceful hamlets loosely gathered round
Their spires still pointing from the graves to God ;—
Past rich and mighty cities far-renowned,
So overcharged with life the soul is awed
To think but of such massed intensity ;
And so into the earth-surrounding sea.

How the rich days of life and joy and light,
The unregretful, unforeboding days,
Usher me softly into solemn night ;
Then sleep her spell divine upon me lays,
And I am tranced and fed with perfect rest,
Or wander far through dreamland, fancy-blest.

Then, when the night's dusk curtains are withdrawn,
And sleep dissolves her spell of mysteries,

With what eternal freshness each new dawn
Greets me with fair and golden promises !
While born anew and young with day's new birth
I hear the lark out-trill my infinite mirth.

So rich and sweet is Life. And what is Death ?
The tranquil slumbers dear and strange and boon
That feed at whiles our waking being's breath ;
The solemn midnight of this glorious noon,
With countless distant stars, and each a sun,
Revealed harmonious with our daily one.

1857: 1859.



SUGGESTED BY MATTHEW ARNOLD'S

"STANZAS FROM THE GRANDE CHARTREUSE."



THAT one long dirge-moan sad and deep,
 Low, muffled by the solemn stress
Of such emotion as doth steep
 The soul in brooding quietness,
Befits our anguished time too well,
Whose Life-march is a funeral knell.

Dirge for a mighty Creed outworn—
 Its spirit fading from the earth,
Its mouldering body left forlorn :
 Weak idol ! feeding scornful mirth
In shallow hearts ; divine no more
Save to some ignorant pagan poor ;

And some who know how by Its light
 The past world well did walk and live,
And feel It even now more bright
 Than any lamp mere men can give ;

So cling to It with yearning faith,
Yet own It almost quenched in death :

While many who win wealth and power
And honours serving at Its shrine,
Rather than lose their worldly dower
Proclaim their dead thing "Life divine ;"
And sacrifice to coward lust
Their own souls' truth, a people's trust.

And will none mourn the mighty Dead,—
Pillar of heavenly fire and cloud,
Which through this life's wild desert led
For whole millenniums each grand crowd
Of sages, bards, saints, heroes, all
Whose names we glory to recall ?

None mourn Him, dead, with deep-moved soul,
Whom, living, all our sires adored ?
None feel the heavy darkness roll
Stifling about us, when the Lord
Leaves us to walk by our own light,
That one pale speck in boundless Night ?—

That earthly lamp when sun and star,
When all the heavenly lights are lost :
Does it shed radiance round afar ?
Our pathway is by deep gulfs cross'd :

It fathoms none. We lift it high :
It casts not one beam on the sky.

If He thus died as no more fit
To lead the modern march of thought,
Supreme,—commanding, guiding it,
With noblest love and wisdom fraught ;
He was at least Divine ; and none
Of human souls can lead it on.

We pine in our dark living tomb,
Waiting the God-illumined One
Who, only, can disperse the gloom ;
Completing what the Dead begun,
Or farther leading us some space
Toward our eternal resting-place.

But Israel wanders shepherdless,
Or gloom-involved unmoving lies,
And in despair's stark sinfulness
Reviles the promised Paradise
It cannot reach—Father divine !
Let us not long thus hopeless pine.

Still the deep dirge-notes long and low
Breathe forth strange anguish to recall—
Could we forget—our direst woe :
A proud strong Age fast losing all

Earth has of Heaven ; bereft of faith ;
And living in Eternal Death.

And loudly boastful of such life :
 Blinded by our material might,
Absorbed in frantic worldly strife,
 Unconscious of the utter Night
Whose palpable and monstrous gloom
Is gathering for our spirits' tomb.

We feel as gods in our own hearts ;
 Seeming to conquer Time and Space ;
Wealth gorging our imperial marts ;
 Earth pregnant, from the fierce embrace
Our matter-lusting *spirits* press,
With unexampled fruitfulness.

God, answering well our worldly prayer,
 Our hearts' chief prayer through all the hours
Of selfish joy and sordid care,
 Comes down to us in golden showers :
God turns to Mammon at our cry ;
Our souls wealth-crushed, dross-stifled lie.

Those few, how rich ! while this great mass,
 Myriads with equal greed for gold,
Sink in such want and woe, alas !
 As never can on earth be told :

These starve, and those yet wealthier rise;
Meanwhile in both the spirit dies.

Hear now the thrilling dirge-notes peal
The anguished cry in thunder rolls :—
The few yet left who think and feel,
Who yearn with strenuous soaring souls
For more than earth or time can grant ;
Where, where shall they appease their want ?

Black disbelief, substantial doubt
Wreath—blent into one louring cloud
Through which Heaven's light can scarce shine out—
Round all the Faiths: all in such shroud
Fade ghostlike to th' entombing Past :
Our Heaven is wildly overcast.

Yet each Creed, senile, sick, half-dead,
With bitter spite and doting rage
Reviles all others. Whoso, led
By thirst of love to pilgrimage,
Seeks now old God-given Wells of Life,
Finds drought-dry centres of vain strife ;

And turns away in blank despair,
To scoff or weep as fits his mood.
O God in Heaven, hear our prayer !
We know Thou art, Allwise, Allgood,

Yet sink in godless misery :
Oh, teach us how to worship Thee !

PART II.

The great Form lies there nerveless still :

But as we fix our longing gaze
It grows in grandest beauty, till
We worship in entranced amaze ;
Such holy love and wisdom seem
To be there rapt in heavenly dream.

Oh, if He may once more awake !

Oh, if it be not death, but sleep !—
And He from that dread slumber break

Refreshed and strong, full-powered to sweep
The darkness from our path again ;
Once more the Guiding Star of men !

Yet—though it be death—view It well.

The brow, how nobly high and broad !
What love on those shut lips might well !

This Form sublimely templed God :
And, if not perfect, is a shrine
Approaching well the most divine.

Do not turn hastily away

From mighty death to petty life ;

Gaze in deep reverence on the clay
With such a soul's expression rife :
Read here, read long, the features worn
By One incarnate Heavenly-born.

So may we hope to recognise
That Greater One who shall succeed
This death-bound Monarch, who now lies
In mute appealing for our need :
God cannot long desert His earth ;
In the Old's death the New has birth.

What say we?—we know well this truth,
There is no death for the Divine ;
Which lives in ever-perfect youth :
The Form alone—its earthly shrine—
Is subject to earth's mortal sway ;
Sickens, and dies, and rots away.

Thus each Form in its turn expires,
No more with all revealed Truth rife,—
Which even at that time inspires
Some new and nobler form with life,
Grander and vaster to express
More of Its infinite heavenliness.

Thus has it been since Time's first birth,
Thus must it be for evermore :

Still lie, moth-eaten, on the earth

Old garments which this Spirit wore ;
Till, soiled and rent, they were off-thrown,
And wider-flowing robes put on.

They could not grow with His great growth,
Pauseless though slow throughout the years ;
And vainly worshippers—so loath
To leave what lengthened use endears—
May still the empty robes adore ;
Their virtue was from Him who wore.

Let none say the Divine is dead,
Although this Form be soul-less quite :
The Heavenly Sun doth ever shed
His lifeful heat, His saving light ;
Never our earth doth lose His ray,
Save when she turns herself away.

Let none say the Divine is dumb,
Although His voice no more we hear :
It is that we are deaf become.

For measured to each eye and ear
His glory shines, His voice outspeaks ;
To each He gives the most it seeks.

Our spirits may for ever grow ;
And He will fill them as before,

And still their measure overflow

With His unlessered infinite More :

He gives us all we can receive ;

He teaches all we can believe.

The pure can see Him perfect-pure ;

The strong feel Him, Omnipotence ;

The wise, All-wise ; He is obscure

But to the gross and earth-bound sense :

Alas for us with blinded sight

Who dare to cry, There is no light !

PART III.

Nay, ask us not to rise and leave

Him from whom power and life seem gone ;

Say not that it is weak to grieve ;

Duty does *not*, *now*, urge us on :

In vain ye urge ; too well we know

We cannot by our own strength go.

Vainly ye choose you Saviours now

Of men,—however good and wise

Be those your mean faith would endow

With power to which no man can rise :

No best men living lure our faith

From the Divine though veiled in death.

Vainly ye wander every way
Throughout the earth in search of Heaven,
Changing your useless path each day
With each new transient impulse given
By human guides, who still agree
In naught but fallibility.

We should know better from the lore
Of worldly wisdom—keen mistrust—
On which our minds so love to pore ;
Nor leave for any child of dust
This One Divine : to Him adhere
Till the diviner One appear.

My brothers, let us own the truth,
Bitter and mournful though it be,—
That we, who spent our dreary youth
In foul and sensual slavery,
Are all too slavish, too unmanned,
For Conquerors of the Promised Land.

In unprogressive wanderings
We plod the desert to and fro ;
And fiery serpents' mortal stings,
Earthquake and sword and weary woe
And pestilence deal fearful death
Amongst us for our want of faith.

Far-scattered o'er the Waste forlorn
Our bones shall whiten through the years,
And startle pilgrims yet unborn ;
Our noblest captains, priests and seers,
Dark death shall one by one remove,
For lack of wisdom, faith, or love.

Yet be we patient, meek and pure,
Unselfishly resigned to God's
Mysterious judgments ; and endure
Our sore scarce-intermittent loads
Of grief and weary pain, imbued
With sternly passive fortitude :

And pray that those who shall succeed
Prove worthy of a happier life
Than we dare ask for as our meed ;
That they a constant noble strife
Victorious against Ill may wage,
And gain the glorious heritage.

Cease now to cry and storm, and move,
By such tumultuous toil oppress
As, without guidance, vain must prove.

When God keeps still can ye not rest ?
When He sends night so dark and deep,
Why shrink from renovating sleep ?

Sleep, to His care resigned, a space ;
That when He rises in His might
To lead our hosts from this dire place,
We may have strength and heart to fight
All evils that would bar our way,
And march unfaltering all the day.

Yes, let us stay in loving grief,
Which patient hope and trust yet cheer,
Silent beside our silent Chief,
Till His Successor shall appear ;
Till death's veil fall from off His face,
Or One anointed take His place.

Nay,—our adoring love should have
More faith than to believe that He,
Before Another comes to save,
Can leave us in blind misery
Without a Guide : God never can
So utterly depart from man.

We will move onward !—let us trust
That there is life and saving power
In this dear Form which seems but dust.
Arise, arise ! though darkness lower,
Earnest, bold-hearted, cease to mourn ;
It shall before our hosts be borne.

Triumphantly He ever led
Our faithful armies while alive ;
What though His form be cold and dead,
His Spirit doth that death survive :
We conquer by that Soul this Form
Enshrined, not ill, while free and warm.

Thus men have honoured fellow men,
Who dying left a lofty fame ;
And won most glorious victories then
By inspiration of a Name :
If in men's names such life abode,
Shall there not in *His*,—Son of God.

A dawn-light creeps throughout the gloom,
Sullenly sinks the storm of wrath ;
Life blossoms in our desert tomb ;
Mysteriously we find a path
Which leadeth on to Paradise.
Thus to our love's faith He replies !

But, while the dirge still rolls away
In passionate thunders wildly blent
With mournful moanings, let us pray—
Still on our Holy War intent—
“O God, revive the seeming Dead ;
Or send Another in His stead !

"The wintry midnight drear is past,
But still the dawn gleams grey and cold ;
Dread phantoms haunt each restless blast,
Our stumblings still are manifold :
Oh, let Thy cloudless Sun rise soon,
And flood us with His summer noon ! "

July, 1855.



BY THE SEA.



I.

THE burning golden Rose of the Day
Droops down to the Western Sea ;
And the amber and purple flush of the sky
And the crimson glow of the sea
Ebb, ebb away,—fade, fade and die ;
While the earth, all mantled in shadowy grey,
Washes her brow with a restful sigh
In the cool sweet dews of the gloaming.

Then the shining silver Lily of the Night
Opens broad her leaves divine,
Afloat on the azure hyaline
Of the heavenly sea ; and her purest light
Kisses the earth that dreaming lies
In a still, enchanted sleeping ;
While the heavens with their countless starry eyes
Still watch are keeping.

The Earth loves the golden Rose of the Day,
From which she distils the fiery wine
Of immortal youth and magnificent might ;
But the Sea loves the silver Lily of the Night,
For her beams are as wands of a holier sway,
Whose spell brings the trance divine :
The Rose for Life's feast and the festal array,
The Lily for Death's shrine.

II.

"The moving waters at their priestlike task
Of pure ablution round earth's human shores."

—KEATS.

The earth lay breathless in a fever-swoon
Beneath the burning noon,
Sun-stricken, dazed with light and sick with heat :
Then came the waters from the cool midsea
Trooping up blithe and free,
And fanned her brow with airs so fresh and sweet
And crept about her gently and caressed
Her broad unheaving breast
With the white cincture of a magic zone ;
Bathing and swathing her faint limbs, that were
In the fierce sun-fire bare,
With lucid liquid folds of rich green purple strown.

Then as the sun went sinking to his rest
Down the enamoured west,
The waves were leaving the calm earth to dream
Bearing the smirch of her long day's turmoil,
The sweat of her fierce toil,
The sultry breaths and languid feverous streams
Bearing all far away, and as they went
Whispering with blithe content,
To drown and cleanse them in the pure midsea
The while the earth all dewy sweet and clean,
And drowsily serene
Beneath the star-dewed heavens might slumber
and free.

III.

A BATHING SNATCH.

O Sun lay down thy golden bridge
Across the waters clear !
O foam flash round each rock and ridge
That soon shall disappear !
O tide swell up a full spring-tide
Upon the shingly shore !
For, oh, I love thy surge-sweep wide
And long-resounding roar !

IV.

A LAMENT.

Leafless and brown are the trees ;
And the wild waste rocks are brown,
Which the wan green sea so stealthily
Comes creeping up to drown ;
And the north-west breeze blows chill,
And the sky is cold and pale ;
And nevermore from this desolate shore
Shall I watch my true-love's sail.

V.

The stars came gliding out of the sea
To gaze on the sleeping city,
With a tremulous light in their glances bright
Of wonderful love and pity.

The breeze was breathing its olden song
In a drowsy murmurous chanting ;
While the noble bay, with its moonlight spray,
Kept time in a slumbrous panting.

The city couched in a deep repose
All toil, all care suspended ;
The roar and the strife of its turbid life
In the calm of nature blended.

Alas ! I sighed with a weary sigh,
That all the sin and sorrow,
Now dreaming there, so calm and fair,
Must wake afresh to-morrow.

Would that the whole might thus rest
Entranced, for ever sleeping ;
The sea and the sky, and the stars on
And those myriads born for weeping

Jersey, 1861-1862.



PROLOGUE

TO THE

PILGRIMAGE TO SAINT NICOTINE OF THE HOLY
HERB.

—o—

IN every country and in every age
Have men been wont to go on pilgrimage,
As I have read,—each visiting that shrine
Which seems to him most blessèd and divine ;
Athwart far lands, athwart the wild sea foam :
Some to Jerusalem, and some to Rome ;
And some to Lourdes,—*très lourdes, très lourdes*, God wot,
Les pauvres âmes which seek *that* sacred spot ;
And some to Santiago far in Spain,
Anear the roar of the Atlantic main ;
And some unto our Lady of Lorette,—
Full many votaries this Dame doth get :
The very Paynims bring their vows and prayers
To Mecca and to Yeddo and Benares :
While others piously seek out the tombs
Of mighty men who have fulfilled their dooms,

The fields where battles long ago were fought,
The scenes wherever wondrous works were wrought,
The sites of antique cities overthrown,
The fanes of fair gods dead and turned to stone :—
What need write more? when saint and bard and
sage

Declare our whole life but one Pilgrimage ;
A journey from the cradle to the bier
Of all the restless millions wandering here ;
A toilsome travel of all things alive
Unto the Temple where they all arrive,
And bowing down before the Shrine of Death
Find peace at last in breathing their last breath.

But furthermore thus teacheth the wise man ;
That age by age our human caravan
Is like unto all those that went before
And all that shall come after evermore :
New names, new robes, new thoughts and words and
deeds,
New toys and treasures, sciences and creeds,
But ever the same passions and same needs :
The same old Drama on the same old Stage,
The same old tears and laughter, joy and rage ;
The selfsame characters upon the Scene,
Wise, foolish, rich and poor, and great and mean ;

Old actors fall away with weary hearts,
Fresh actors come to take the selfsame parts ;
And whosoe'er the destined rôles may fill,
Hamlet is Hamlet—Osric, Osric still ;
And ever with the fifth act come the knaves
To vent their clownish jests and dig the graves ;
And ever with the last scene entereth
Some princely one demanding—"O proud death,
What feast is toward in thine eternal cell ?"
And so the Play is over : very well,
It shall be played again, and have a run,
Coëval with the earth's around the sun.

Lo this is what men call philosophie,
Whereof I know not anything perdie,
But it hath brought us to our proper theme,
Our CARD of beauty and of joy supreme,
Our peerless PILGRIMAGE unto the SHRINE
Of most beneficent SAINT NICOTINE.
Five hundred years ago DAN CHAUCER went
A-riding through the pleasant lanes of Kent,
In April on the eight and twentieth day,
Which were with us I ween a week in May,¹

¹ There has been much learned astronomical discussion, of dubious import, about the exact time of the year, as indicated in the opening of the Prologue to the "*Canterbury Tales*." If the deep scientific gentlemen engaged had but condescended to look forward

He and his compaignie of twenty-nine,
 Both men and women, to the holy shrine
 Of Him by hot Knights at the altar slain,
 And now by Master Froude killed over again
 All in cold blood ; alas ! a piteous doom,
 Sword-pierced in life and pen-pierced in the tomb :
 But Master Freeman now hath set to work
 To maul this Froude as if he were a Turk ;
 And he who kicked A'Becket as he lay
 Is like to kick the bucket in this fray.
 This compaignie it was of all degrees,
 The high, the low, the midway ; and all these,
 Yea, each and all, our POET doth rehearse
 And picture lifelike in his cordial verse ;

to the Man of Law's Prologue they might have read in the beginning thereof—

“ And though he [the host] were not depe expert in lore,
 He wiste it was the eighte and twenty day
 Of April, that is messenger to May.”

This may suffice to fix the date accurately enough for us who are not astronomers. The Old Style, I suppose, would then be about eight days behind the New, as the difference I believe increases three days in every four centuries (one in each of the three which is not a multiple of four), and was eleven days in 1752, when the New Style was adopted in England (we all know how the populace vociferously demanded the eleven days of which they conceived themselves defrauded) : the Russians, who keep to the Old Style, now date twelve days behind us. Thus Chancer's April 28 would be our May 6. In reading Herrick and his contemporaries on the delights of going a-Maying, we are apt to forget that their May-day the 1st was our 11th ; so with many old weather proverbs.

As sweet and rath as his own daisy was
"Upon the smalè, softè, swotè gras,"
As rich and free and cheerful as the gush
Of gratulation from a mid-June thrush :
I rede you read him once and twice and thrice,
And over again ; it is my boon advice ;
And learn what all these men and women were
In mind and body, state and garb and air ;
And feel what full red-blooded life did flow
Thorough their veins five hundred years ago ;
And find what Tales they told upon their way
Of noble tragedy and jolly play ;
And see that we are now what they were then,
Since fashions change, not women, neither men.

What this first Poet, whom we love so well,
Of merrie England, in his verse did tell
Of these glad Pilgrims, both their mind and make,
That Artist of the Visions clepèd BLAKE,
Who also sang delightful young-world songs,
Soaring aloof from all our old-world wrongs,
Did picture forth with pencil and engrave,
Form after form to match the POET brave :
We touch not him, for he was grand and wild ;
We leave this giant who became a child.
A graceful limner, STOTHARD was his name,
Did set himself to enterprise the same,

And him we follow in our noble CARD ;
But whereas he went backward to the BARD
Through all the centuries, to match his rhyme,
We choose our Pilgrims from our very time :
For why ? our SAINT is not the Saint of old,
But hath more votaries a hundredfold ;
Lo you shall hear of him anon, but first
Behoves the jolly Pilgrims be rehearsed ;
New Saint, New Pilgrims, but the counterparts
Of CHAUCER's rout *en route* in brains and hearts.

1878.



ARCH ARCHERY.



YOU ask me, darling, why I smile,
And at what pleasant thing?
My thoughts go back a few months' while
To the fairest day in spring;

Over the rolling waves of sward
We lightly skimmed along ;
While the larks from the cloud and the azure
Freely their first full song ——

Then leaf-like came a-dropping down,
When their joy thro' heaven was told,
To the short sweet grass, to the gorse half bro
Half lit with shining gold.

And I said or thought : Not Dian queen
With her quiver and her bow,
A statelier form, a purer mien,

Hit we the mark, or hit we not,
What merry laughs and jeers !

Gaily we tripped along the glen
Between the targets two,
With riant races now and then
For arrows in the dew.

O arch was she with her jest and smile,
And arch was I, I ween ;
But the Archer archest all the while
Was shooting there unseen.

Swift, swift and keen his arrows flew,
Well aimed at either heart ;
And pierced the poor things thro' and thro',
With a strange delicious smart.

Well—when the match was fairly done,
Who triumphed, she or I ?
We both had lost, we both had won ;
It ended in a tie.

For that third Archer, we agreed,
Alone should judge the case ;
And thus he solemnly decreed,
With wisdom in his face.—

“You—maiden of the witching eyes,
You—happiest of men ;
Must share the honour and the prize,
Nor ever strive again.

“For thus on either I bestow
The meed that fitteth well—
She is the mistress of the bow,
He bears away the bell.”

Curragh, 1860.

LOW LIFE.

AS OVERHEARD IN THE TRAIN.



THAT jolly old gentleman, bless his white hat !
Wouldn't come in to spoil our chat ;
We are alone and we can speak,—
What have you done, Miss, all the week ?

“ Oh, all the day it's been fit and shew,
And all the night it's been trim and sew,
For the ladies are flocking to Exeter Hall
In lovely light dresses fit for a ball.”

Under your eye a little dark streak,
And a point of red on the top of your cheek,
And your temples quite dim against your hair ;
This sha'n't last very much longer I swear.

And what is the news from the workroom now ?
“ The week began with a bit of a row ;
Emmy Harley married young Earl
Just in the busy time ! ”—sensible girl !

“That was on Monday ; Missis said
It was very ungrateful, very ill-bred,
And very unkind to us when she knew
The work so heavy, the hands so few.

“But this was nothing : the minute we woke
On Wednesday, before it seemed any one spoke,
We knew that poor Mary Challis was dead ;
Kate Long had been sleeping in the same bed.

“Mary worked with us till twelve, when tea
Was brought in to keep us awake, but she
Was so ill then, Miss Cooper sent her to bed ;
And there in the morning they found her dead ;

“With Kate fast asleep by her side : they had come
To see how she was, and the sight struck them dumb :
At last they roused Kate and led her away ;
She was sick and shuddering all the day.

“Kate says when she went up at four to their room
She was stupid with sleep ; but she marked a faint bloom
On Mary’s pale face, and she heard her breathe low—
A light fluttering breath now quick and now slow ;

“And feared to disturb her, for *she* had a cough,
But the moment she laid her head down she was off,
And knew nothing more till they stood by the side
Of the bed : p’r’aps Mary slept on till she died.

"They buried her yesterday. Kate was there,
And she was the only one Missis could spare ;
Some dresses were bound to be finished by night,
For the ladies to go in to Church all right.

"Poor Mary ! she didn't fear dying she said,
Her father drinks and her mother is dead ;
But she hoped that in Heaven the white garments wear
For ever ; no fashions and dressmaking There."

My Love, if the ladies most pious of all
Who flock to the Church and to Exeter Hall
Find Heaven has but one dress for rich as for poor,
And no fashions, they'll very soon cut it I'm sure.

I saw you ten minutes on Tuesday night,
Then I took the 'bus home for I had to write ;
And I wrote and I wrote like an engine till five,
When my fingers were dead and the letters alive.

A fair bill of costs from a deuce of a draft
In our Cashier's worst scrawl like Chinese ran daft ;
With entries between, on the margin, the back,
And figures like short-hand marks put to the rack.

But our Common-law Clerk is going away,
And the Gov'nor had me in yesterday,
And said he would try me, he thought I might do ;
And I jumped at the chance, for this child thinks so too.

Just fancy, each morning a jolly good walk,
And instead of the copying, bustle and talk !
And if I do well—and well I will do—
A couple of sov.s a week for my screw !

And then when I'm free of the desk and the stool,
Do you think you will keep to the nunnery rule
Of the shop, till you go off like Mary some night
Smothered in work from the air and the light.

We'll use our professional talents, my dear :
You shall make such a wedding dress, best of the year !
And a wonderful marriage-deed I will draw
With magnificent settlements perfect in law.

Thus doing our duties in those states of life
In which it has pleased God to call us, *my wife !*
“And how much a year will you settle on me ?”
My body and soul and—what we shall see.

1865.



THE DREAMER.



SING the old song while the dear child is sleeping,
Sing it most sweetly and tenderly low ;
Not to awake her again to her weeping ;
Let the soft notes through her dream gently flow.
What, though the passionate tears were down-streaming
From eye-balls long parched, when she lay down to
rest :
Poor thing, she now is most tranquilly dreaming ;
Her life is again with His dear presence blest.

See, o'er her wan face what joy brightly flushes ;
Beneath the dark lids how her eyes swell and gleam !
The sweet smile is drowned in the glow of love-blushes !
Yes ! he companions her now in the dream.
Darling ! her lips murmur softly and slowly,—
What sacred vows and confessions of love ?
Is not this Dream-life most blessèd and holy,
Less of the earth than of Heaven above ?

No, do not draw down the white lawny curtain :

The moonlight sleeps still on her hair, on her face ;

Mystical blending of shadow uncertain

With lustre as holy as Heaven's blessed grace.

It stirs not her slumber, but chastened and tender,—

Our musical murmur half-thrilling its breast—

Pervades with a blissful entrancement of splendour

That dim world of dreams where her soul findeth rest. ✱

Sing the old song still with low-voiced sweetness,

To harmonise well with her brief dream of bliss,

Blending therewith to ecstatic completeness :—

The poor pallid lips, are they trembling a kiss !

So may the words and the scenes of her vision

To her tranced spirit more exquisite grow ;

With beauty and glory and rapture Elysian

Subtly attuned to our soft music's flow. ✱

And she may, alas, when she wakes with the morrow

To bitter reality, hopeless and lone,

Remember far more to sooth anguish and sorrow

Of the dream and the dream-words of him who is gone :

And so, when we sing the old song in her hearing,

May she with wonder and secret joy find

The dear words, the bliss of her dream re-appearing

With the loved music that flows through her mind.

Perhaps she now hears him an old love-lay singing ;
Does it not thrill in her eager, fixed face ?
Or hears the old Church-bells in golden chimes ringing
The union that cannot in this world take place.
But sleep, darling, sleep ; oh, dwell long in that heaven,
The strange, solemn dream-land so holy and calm,
Which God hath in mercy to such as thee given ;
Where all stricken hearts may find wound-healing balm.

1855.



ROBERT BURNS.



HE felt scant need
Of church or creed,
He took small share
In saintly prayer,
His eyes found food for his love ;
He could pity poor devils condemned to hell,
But sadly neglected endeavours to dwell
With the angels in luck above :
To save one's precious peculiar soul
He never could understand is the whole
Of a mortal's business in life,
While all about him his human kin
With loving and hating and virtue and sin
Reel overmatched in the strife.
" The heavens for the heavens, and the earth for the
earth !
I am a Man—I'll be true to my birth—
Man in my joys, in my pains."

So fearless, stalwart, erect and free,
He gave to his fellows right royally
 His strength, his heart, his brains ;
For proud and fiery and swift and bold—
Wine of life from heart of gold,
The blood of his heathen manhood rolled
 Full-billowed through his veins.

1859.



WILLIAM BLAKE.



HE came to the desert of London town
 Grey miles long ;
He wandered up and he wandered down,
 Singing a quiet song.

He came to the desert of London town,
 Mirk miles broad ;
He wandered up and he wandered down,
 Ever alone with God.

There were thousands and thousands of human kind
 In this desert of brick and stone :
But some were deaf and some were blind,
 And he was there alone.

At length the good hour came ; he died
 As he had lived, alone :
He was not missed from the desert wide,
 Perhaps he was found at the Throne.

SONG.



“THE Nightingale was not yet heard,
For the Rose was not yet blown.”¹

His heart was quiet as a bird
Asleep in the night alone,
And never were its pulses stirred
To breathe or joy or moan :
The Nightingale was not yet heard
For the Rose was not yet blown.

Then She bloomed forth before his sight
In passion and in power,
And filled the very day with light,
So glorious was her dower ;
And made the whole vast moonlit night
As fragrant as a bower :
The young, the beautiful, the bright,
The splendid peerless Flower.

¹ “Traveller in Persia” (Mr. Binning); cited by Mr. Fitzgerald in the notes to his translation of Omar Khayyam.

Whereon his heart was like a bird
When Summer mounts his throne,
And all its pulses thrilled and stirred
To songs of joy and moan,
To every most impassioned word
And most impassioned tone ;
The Nightingale at length was heard
For the Rose at length was blown.

February, 1877.



A CHANT.



WHILE the trees grow,
While the streams flow,
While the winds blow,

We will be free !

Free as trees growing,
Free as streams flowing,
Free as winds blowing,
Evermore free !



ON A BROKEN PIPE.



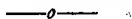
NEGLECTED now it lies a cold clay form,
So late with living inspirations warm :
Type of all other creatures formed of clay—
What more than it for Epitaph have they ?



A P R O E M.

“Carouse in the Past.”

ROBERT BROWNING'S *Saul*.



WE will drink anew of old pleasures ;
In the golden chalice of song
We will pour out the wine-like treasures
Of memories hidden long.

Old memories, hidden but cherished,
In a heart-nook deep and calm ;
They have not faded and perished
Like the old friends they embalm.

We will call them forth from their darkness
As we call forth a rare old wine
Which the long rich years have mellowed
Till the flavour is divine.

In a glorious intoxication
Will we revel while such drink may last ;
And dead to the leaden-houred Present,
Live in golden hours of the Past.

NOTES.



It seems proper to give some account of the way in which my editorial duties have been performed. All the poems in the early part of the volume (pp. 1 to 75) were proposed for publication by the author himself : so that, with regard to them, I had no duty to perform except to print them as they stood. It may be worth while, however, to mention that "Richard Forest's Midsummer Night," as originally written, consisted of twelve sections, two of which the author had marked for omission. One of these sections, however, I have thought it best to retain. The three pieces reprinted from the *Dispatch* seemed to me worth giving if only as evidence of the versatility of the author's powers.

With regard to the early poems which are given in the latter part of the volume, I must own my entire responsibility for their selection and arrangement. I have explained in the introductory memoir my views as to the peculiar character and merits of "The Doom of a City." In a copy of this poem, which the author presented to his friend Mr. John Grant, there is an explanatory note appended to it, which seems worth quoting:—

"I call it a Fantasia, because (lacking the knowledge and power to deal with the theme in its epical integrity)

I have made it but an episode in a human life, instead of a chapter in the history of Fate. Thus it is throughout alloyed with the feelings and thoughts, the fantasies of the supposed narrator; and the verse has all the variableness and abrupt transitions of a man's moods, instead of the solemn uniformity of the laws of Fate.

"The City of the Statues is from the tale of Zobeide in the History of the Three Ladies of Bagdad and the Three Calenders. This episode and the account of the Kingdoms of the Sea in 'Prince Beder and ——,' impressed my boyhood more powerfully than anything else in the 'Arabian Nights.'

"The 'Voyage' is certainly tiresome: but a penny steamboat will not carry one to a City where the people are all petrified,—not simply in soul and mind, but also in flesh and blood and bone."

In explanation of the last paragraph it is necessary to state that the poem originally consisted of four parts, the first of which was entitled "The Voyage." This part I have ventured to omit, for although there is some forcible writing in it, it is certainly inferior in merit to the rest of the poem. Moreover, the author once informed me that it was his intention to alter and curtail this part, which, however, he never found an opportunity of doing. It may be stated that this first part relates how the narrator of the story puts forth to sea in an open boat: how he encounters a fearful storm, and afterwards a sea-monster, from both of which he escapes. I have made the poem commence with the last section of the first part; but no other alteration or omission has been made.

The Poet and his Muse, p. 55.

To the original MS. of this poem the following note was appended, "Not true now, but true of seven songless years."

The Doom of a City, p. 92.

In the copy of this poem from which I have already quoted an explanatory passage, a few notes occur written in pencil. These seem to be worth preserving, and I therefore give them below :—

" 'The chemistry of terror thus intense
Burns them all lurid on the shrinking sense,' p. 109.

"De Quincey has a like simile in the 'Opium-Eater':—
'The fierce chemistry of his dreams burns daily objects into
insufferable splendour.'

" 'It is with swelling reverence dedicate,' p. 111.

"The dedication suggested by that of Bacon's 'Advancement of Learning.'

" 'I take thee, Misery, for my faithful Bride,' p. 113.

"See Shelley's 'Misery, a Fragment.'

" 'Their Æon is fulfilled,' p. 125.

"This is, I conceive, the true meaning of Æon, as developed in one of De Quincey's papers, 'On the Scriptural Expression Eternity.'

" 'The stars for ever sweep through space, surrounding,' p. 145.

"[This chorus was] written in 1855 : adopted here because something of the kind was wanted, and its existence hindered me from writing a new Chorus specially for this

piece. It does not fit in precisely, and is the only bit of thus-adopted work."

A Festival of Life, p. 169.

At the end of a copy of this poem which the author presented to Mr. Grant, I find the following note:—"I fear that you will find the above very turgid throughout ('The wreck of matter in the crash of words,' to improve Addison's notorious line); but the conception was so dithyrambic, and the stanza so long and elaborate, that I have not been able to tone down the diction."

By the Sea, p. 228.

The pieces given under this heading are extracted from a long narrative poem, called "Ronald and Helen," the main portion of which is written in the same metre as "Weddah' and Om-el-Bonain." It is not one of Mr. Thomson's best works; but nevertheless it contains many brilliant passages: and I shall be glad if the present volume meets with sufficient success to justify the publication of that and the rest of the uncollected poems.

Prologue to the Pilgrimage to St. Nicotine, p. 233.

The poem of which this is the commencement was written to accompany and explain a large coloured plate, an imitation or rather burlesque of Stothard's "Canterbury Pilgrims." Each of the Pilgrims represented some prominent personage of the day, and the verses summed up, in a few pungent lines, his or her characteristics. The whole piece is worth reprinting, but this could not well be done without reprinting the plate also.

Robert Burns, p. 250.

These lines are extracted from the article on Burns which I have mentioned in the Memoir. The verses are there stated to be part of "a queer ode dedicated to him:" and after giving them the author adds:—"The somewhat inebriate dithyrambist is perhaps right in seizing as the essential characteristics of Burns his vigorous strength and intense human or earthly sympathies."

William Blake, p. 252.

This poem forms the conclusion of Thomson's Essay on Blake, which was published in the *National Reformer*.

Works by James Thomson.

The City of Dreadful Night, and other Poems. 5s.

Vane's Story, and other Poems. 5s.

Essays and Phantasies. 6s.

OPINIONS OF THE PRESS.

"Those who received Mr. Thomson's 'City of Dreadful Night' as a singularly powerful manifestation of poetic imagination will be naturally eager to learn how he deals with prose. When we say we are not disappointed, we have given him high praise. We do not mean that his command of prose is as great as his mastery of metre, for it fails here and there; but that he can write such English as few can write nowadays is, we think, beyond dispute. The opening essay, called 'Our Lady of Sorrow,' is the prose equivalent of 'The City of Dreadful Night.' Indeed, one can trace a marked correlation between Mr. Thomson's prose and poetic work. In the essay, as in the poem, there is gloomy beauty, a profound and pathetic despair, and a keen sympathy with humanity. The language is majestic, sonorous, and musical, and in perfect harmony with the vague sublimity of the thought. In the articles called 'Open Secret Societies,' the 'Sayings of Sigvat,' and 'A Walk Abroad,' the same qualities are displayed, but not to such an impressive extent. 'The Fair of St. Sylvester' shows Mr. Thomson's power of expressing a joyous and graceful vein of feeling, just as 'Sunday up the River' showed a poetic expression of this mood. . . . As a literary work, and as manifesting a rare delicacy of humour, we are inclined to value the paper entitled 'Indolence,' above all but the first essay. In it Mr. Thomson shows that he has the making of an essayist *pur et simple*. And this is the more noticeable, because a really fine essayist is the rarest of all literary phenomena, even when essay-writing alone is attempted, and particularly remarkable when met in conjunction with Mr. Thomson's other gifts. . . . Generally we may say that *Essays and Phantasies* is a book which will delight all who care for fine English prose, high imagination and suggestive ingenuity."—*Spectator*.

"Mr. Thomson is already well known to most readers as the author of a strange and brilliant volume of poems, 'The City of Dreadful

Night,' in which the melancholy pessimism of Leopardi is expressed with the exquisite music of the 'Castle of Indolence,' and in which, at the same time, with a strange contradiction inherent in poetic natures, the author has celebrated the country enjoyments of the lower classes as they have seldom been done before. Indeed there are those among Mr. Thomson's readers who think he did higher things in his wonderful 'Sunday at Hampstead,' and 'Sunday up the River,' than in all the defiant pessimism and despairing melancholy of 'The City of Dreadful Night.' That Mr. Thomson is not so attractive in prose as in verse is hardly to be wondered at, for if a man can write really good verse he is naturally more interesting than the man who can write really good prose, because the one accomplishment is rarer than the other, especially in this generation of little poets. As most of Mr. Thomson's poems were collections of earlier years, so most of these essays are collected from the various papers to which they were contributed any time between 1864 and 1875."—*Westminster Review*.

"The appearance of a verse-writer of real power who belongs to no school, and can hardly be called a debtor to any living poet, is a thing to be welcomed with something more than the attention commonly given to a new volume in metre. . . . We are speaking of Mr. Thomson as of a new poet; the truth is, that most of the pieces in this volume are dated from ten to fifteen years ago, some farther back still, and some few have already been published. But the scattered and casual publicity of magazines is not enough for solid reputation. To many lovers of poetry Mr. Thomson's work will doubtless be as new as, we confess, it is to ourselves. . . . Mr. Thomson dedicates his book to the memory of Leopardi, and he has certainly drunk deep of Leopardi's intense pessimism. . . . Whether this bitterly despairing mood is really the one most congenial to the poet, is a matter on which we have no title to be curious, nor would the inquiry be relevant to the artistic merit of his work. In any case, it is not the only mood he is capable of. In 'Sunday at Hampstead' and 'Sunday up the River,' Mr. Thomson gives us two idyllic scenes full of brilliant verse and fancy. From 'Sunday up the River' we quote some lines on a sunrise of early summer; which, be it observed, are not mere ornamental description, but have, as all true poetic description should have, their definite function in expounding the poet's mind. . . . There is a power in these lines which reminds one of Shelley, though there is no question of imitation. But to set them off as is their due the lighter verse that follows ought also to be quoted. Indeed, frequent transitions of tone and metre are a marked feature of the poem, which is not so much a single idyll as a *Liederkreis*. 'The Naked Goddess' is a legend or allegory for

every reader to interpret as he will. To many it will seem strange, to some foolish; those who know Blake will breathe in it a familiar air. Either Mr. Thomson has caught inspirations from Blake for this poem (and caught them very well), or it is a singular coincidence of poetical temper. Another piece to be specially mentioned, as showing at its best Mr. Thomson's command of verse and diction, is 'The Lord of the Castle of Indolence.' . . . We have shown as much of Mr. Thomson's poetic style as can fairly be shown in the space of a review. It has the first and best mark of genuine poetry, the directness and large simplicity which seem to make discussion impossible. The words are not built or driven together, but come in their places as if it were the most natural thing for them to do, and they could not help it. This quality of Mr. Thomson's work reminds us now and then of Wordsworth, we mean in his happier vein, when he is naturally and truly simple, not in the pieces where he affects a forced and bald rusticity. Mr. Thomson includes in his volume some modestly entitled 'Attempts at Translation from Heine.' They are very good, but their interest is rather dimmed by the company in which they appear. Plenty of people are always ready to translate Heine more or less tolerably—and well enough, perhaps, for those who cannot read the original. But such verse as that of 'The Lord of the Castle of Indolence' is not to be had to order, or to be met with every day. We hope that we may 'one day expect from Mr. Thomson, not more finished work, for that we could hardly desire, but something framed on a scale and with a continuity of design which shall give his powers ampler scope.'—*Pall Mall Gazette*.

"The author has high gifts. . . . These are mainly a directness, brilliance, and vigour, such as we see in Ebenezer Elliott, without his ill temper, and with a native melody, and a sense of beauty, such as the Corn-Law Rhymer never showed."—*Athenæum*.

"The present volume of verse is an unusually interesting one, testifying, indeed, to a certain lack of range in the author's thought, and to a concentration of his ideas upon certain riddles which the wise indifference of the wise is apt to leave unattempted, but singularly melodious in expression, dignified and full of meaning, and bearing witness to reading as well as to meditation. . . . The [leading] poem ends with two descriptively allegorical passages of extreme beauty. The one is a vision of a sphinx and an angel, who face each other, undergoing metamorphoses as the spectator gazes, so that the angel, at first armed and winged, loses his wings, then his sword, and then falls prostrate at the feet of the unchanging sphinx. The other is a description of the *Melencolia* not unworthy to be inscribed as a legend under the print itself. But it is exceed-

ingly rare to find a volume, in which so large a number of the pieces contained have a distinct and individual poetic attractiveness. . . . That he has what somebody once called a fine gloomy imagination is not contestable, and, fortunately, he is not always given up to it. His book, if it were ever possible to induce Englishmen to buy poetry except as they buy wine—not because of its goodness, but because of the name of the seller—ought to be widely read. . . . On the whole, the interest and the attraction of the volume are of the most considerable, though we cannot help wishing that Mr. Thomson had read Shakespeare more, and Leopardi less.”—*Academy*,

“When Mr. Thomson elects to write naturally, and dwell on the glory and virtue of nature we are at one with him. Many parts of ‘Sunday at Hampstead’ are excellent, so is ‘Sunday up the River,’ reprinted from *Fraser*; and best of all is the allegorical fable of the ‘Naked Goddess.’ Perhaps the choicest morsel is ‘E. B. B.’, a graceful little dirge for our greatest woman poet, Mrs. Browning.”—*Graphic*.

“‘In the Room,’ a dialogue between the articles of furniture in a darkened and unopened room, leading at last to the disclosure that the occupant is lying dead upon the bed, having died by his own hand, has a fine gradual horror, which is masterly in its way; while the poems entitled ‘Sunday at Hampstead’ and ‘Sunday up the River,’ strike us as being as fresh and original as anything we have read for a considerable time. . . . Such songs as ‘Drink! Drink! open your Mouth,’ and ‘As we Rush, as we Rush in the Train,’ have the best singing quality, and do no small credit to their author.”—*Notes and Queries*.

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